

THE IMPACT THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL IS HAVING  
ON THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH  
IN THE GREATER SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, AREA

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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	vi
Introduction	vii
Chapter	
1      PROBLEM AND SETTING	1
The Fallacy of the Health and Wealth Gospel	1
The Doctrine of the Cross	3
Name It and Claim It	6
A Different Gospel	10
The Prosperity Gospel and Mass Appeal	13
Discernment	17
2      LITERATURE REVIEW	23
A Paradigm Shift from Holiness to Success	23
The Cross, The Old or The New	26
Little gods	33
Doctrine of Greed: Love of Money	35
Godliness with Contentment Equals Great Gain (1 Timothy 6:6)	42
The Divine Health Fallacy	44
3      BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS	47
Counterfeit Faith	47
Abrahamic Covenant	53
Revelation Knowledge	56

	Set the Captives Free	58
	Misreading the Scripture	61
	Sowing and Reaping	66
4	PROJECT DESIGN	70
	Facing the Challenge	70
	House of Prayer or House of Merchandise	71
	Divine Health or Divine Healing	76
	Job’s Faith and the Sovereignty of God	78
	Sound Doctrine	80
	The World at Our Doorsteps	82
	Revelation Knowledge vs. Book Knowledge	84
	Conclusion	86
5	OUTCOMES	89
	Summary of Findings	89
	The Gospel of Enticement	90
	Out with the Poor, In with the Rich	93
	Identifying with the New Cross	94
	Our Leadership Must Be Rooted and Grounded in the Faith	96
	Recommendation	97
	APPENDICES	101
A.	Informed Consent Document	101
B.	Researcher’s Statement	102
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	103
	VITA	108

## ABSTRACT

This thesis-project, *The Impact the Prosperity Gospel is Having on the Pentecostal Church in the Greater San Antonio, Texas Area*, addresses the problem that the Pentecostal church must face in confronting the prosperity gospel. This gospel of health and wealth is making inroads into the Pentecostal church at an alarming rate. The promoters of the prosperity gospel prey on the poor and disenfranchised in order to build their kingdoms of wealth and success. The deceptive practices used by the promoters of the health and wealth gospel can leave those who have bought into this so-called gospel confused and disillusioned.

The Pentecostal church has been too passive in addressing the false teachings and teachers who promote this strange gospel. It is my prayer that this thesis-project will help our church leaders to see the danger that our congregations face in coping with this prosperity theology.

## Introduction

The subject I have chosen for this thesis is one that is having an impact on global Christianity, and especially the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. I will concentrate on the impact the prosperity gospel is having on the Pentecostal church in the greater San Antonio, Texas area. This strange gospel is known by several names such as “name it and claim it,” “health and wealth,” “word of faith,” “gospel of success” and “prosperity gospel.” The prosperity gospel is the prominent title that has surfaced for this new gospel message. The prosperity gospel with its promises of good wealth, health and success, has invaded the Pentecostal church like no other outside force. We know that many of our people are being deceived by those who promote the prosperity gospel; this has been a problem that must be addressed by the Pentecostal leadership. My prayer is for God to give us wisdom, understanding, and discernment, as we confront this pressing issue.

## CHAPTER ONE

### PROBLEM AND SETTING

#### **The Fallacy of the Health and Wealth Gospel**

As I write on this subject, I am concerned for our people who are buying into the so-called gospel of prosperity. While I am convinced God blesses his people in many ways, I do not believe that all those who are living in poverty or those who are dealing with health issues have seen in their lives. During the fifty years that I have served the Lord I have known many men and women who have served Jesus faithfully but had very little of this world's goods. I have also known men and women of faith who had to deal with serious health issues. I see a contrast in the life and ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who gave special attention to the poor and downtrodden and the prosperity gospel that caters to those who have wealth. While the promoters of this gospel boast of their wealth and fame, Jesus said to his disciples, "Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the Kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20)<sup>1</sup>.

Over the years I have watched as the prosperity gospel has infiltrated the Pentecostal church at an alarming rate. When I moved to San Antonio, Texas, thirty-two years ago, this strange doctrine was not embraced by the Pentecostal church as it is today. Many of us in church leadership believed this new doctrine was a passing fad and would eventually fade away. But instead of fading away the prosperity gospel has grown in influence and in number. Today we have a problem that the church leadership must deal with. The boasting of wealth and fame is contrary to sound biblical doctrine.

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<sup>1</sup> All scripture citations are taken from the New International Version, 2003, unless otherwise noted.



It is a problem when preachers stand in our churches and teach our people to give, and to name and claim their blessing and God is obligated to bring it to pass. Author and Pentecostal theologian David Ogunbile, tells of attending a crusade by prosperity gospel evangelist Benson Idahosa, where Idahosa said,

My God is not the God of the poor. I will not preach where people will not be blessed. However, before you can be blessed, you have to give to God. See, I have been blessing God and God has been blessing me. See by the podium here my computerized Mercedes-Benz. In six months time, I am riding my jet. Now, deep your hands into your pocket, and bring something (money) out. But remember! Multiply whatever you are bringing out by ten; so you are having the multiple of ten of what you are offering.<sup>2</sup>

This is the problem; this gospel cannot be supported by Scripture. Jesus sought out those who were sick and those who were living in poverty in order to minister to them and they did not have to give to his ministry in order to receive his blessings. The people who give to the ministries of these prosperity preachers expecting a return on their giving are often confused and disillusioned when this does not materialize. This is a problem that we as leaders must address. Giving in order to receive is the wrong motive for giving. Our people must be taught that giving is a form of worship. Those who give to these ministries are often told that if they give a certain amount God will cancel their debt. Often the people are called upon to give money to these ministries that should be used for food and clothing. While they sacrifice to give, these preachers are living in luxury.

There is a problem when the advocates of the prosperity gospel promote class warfare between those who are financially successful and those who are not. The same is true for those who struggle with health issues and those who have been blessed with good health. Those who are poor and sickly are often treated as second-class citizens in the

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<sup>2</sup> David Ogunbile, "African Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel," in *Pentecostal Theology*, ed. Clifton R. Clark (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 134.

Kingdom of God. It should never be tolerated. After all, the Pentecostal church has a great history of reaching out to the poor. We face a real problem when our people are told the reason they are not successful is their lack of faith or there is sin in their life. I personally faced this problem recently, when my brother, who is suffering from a terrible accident was told he was going through this because of a lack of faith. It seems some of these prosperity preachers should study the life of Job and the purpose of his suffering. Job's suffering was not because of his lack of faith nor was it because there was sin in his life.

There is a definite spirit of pride and boasting that glorifies and magnifies ministry accomplishments among the prosperity preachers. It is as the wise man Solomon said, "in the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride" (Proverbs 14:3a NKIV). These preachers remind us again and again of their success. This spirit of pride is not in harmony with those who have surrendered all to follow Christ. The cross demands humility. In his book, *Uncorinethian Leadership*, David Starling states,

The kind of leadership and magnifies God's glory is a humble leadership; it's a leadership that does not seek to impress and to be admired; that does not set out to dazzle people with its own wisdom or to gain advantage in position, but devotes itself to the good of others and is willing to be looked down on and criticized and despised. Leadership that is faithful to the word of the cross is not about the pursuit an accumulation of glory.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Doctrine of the Cross**

The promoters of the prosperity gospel give very little attention to the doctrine of the cross. When they do speak of the cross it is misrepresented. There is no way to teach on the cross without addressing the issue of suffering. For the prosperity crowd the cross

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3 David Starling, *Uncorinethian Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipt and Stock Publishers, 2014), 25.

is outdated, ancient history and is not relevant for this modern-day church. After all the cross is about surrender, self-denial and giving oneself to Jesus. The cross has been redefined by the preachers of this strange gospel. Following in his father's footsteps, Kenneth Hagin Jr. has written,

We don't give up anything to get what belongs to us from Christ. Receiving from God is not about subtracting; it's adding. The gospel is the good news! It is not subtraction; it is addition. We don't give up things to become Christians. And we don't give up things to receive healing. We just take it! We receive what has already been given to us.<sup>4</sup>

This becomes a real problem in light of the instructions Jesus gave to his disciples when he said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it" (Matthew 16:24, 25). It has always intrigued me that these prosperity preachers are so adamantly opposed to the preaching of self-denial and surrender, yet they are so convinced it is God's will for their audience to respond to their message with financial giving before the prosperity blessing comes.

There is a problem when those who profess to follow Jesus embrace the crown but reject the cross. I am reminded of the words of Dr. Bailey Smith, "If we expect to wear the crown, we have to bear the cross."<sup>5</sup> While wearing the crown appeals to the flesh, bearing the cross has no appeal to fleshly appetite. Judas no doubt would have embraced the wearing of the crown, but he was offended by bearing the cross. In this twenty-first Century, the world is still offended by the cross. This is a problem, but the Pentecostal church must embrace the doctrine of the cross.

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4 Kenneth Hagin Jr., *It's Your Move* (Tulsa, OK: Faith Library Publications, 1998), 2.

5 Bailey E. Smith, *Nothing but the Blood* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 200.

The cross has been redefined as an instrument of privilege rather than an instrument of death. Those who follow Jesus come to the cross to die. At the cross we must be willing to give up ownership and totally surrender all to Christ Jesus. The point I am making is that those who surrender their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ are no longer in charge. The gospel the prosperity crowd promotes, and the gospel Jesus taught are in direct conflict. The message of the cross is perverted, and this has become a major problem for the Pentecostal church. I am reminded of the words of the South African Bible teacher and author, Andrew Murray as he wrote, “Come and cast this self-life and flesh-life at the feet of Jesus.”<sup>6</sup> To reject this true message of the cross is to reject the true plan of salvation. Those who preach and teach the prosperity gospel have found a religion without the demands of the cross and this is a problem for the church today. Many of our people are being deceived while these charlatans promote this so-called gospel from our own pulpits.

Evangelist Oral Roberts (1918-2009) became one of the most effective promoters of the prosperity gospel. His book *Miracle of Seed-Faith*, is popular, especially with television evangelists in their fundraising. There is a problem when faith is always connected with money and material things. It is almost impossible to hear a sermon from these preachers and teachers that does not deal with money and material possessions. In his book, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*, theologian Gordon Fee states, “Indeed, the theology of this new ‘gospel’ seems far more to fit the American dream than it does as a teaching of Him who had ‘nowhere to lay his head.’”<sup>7</sup>

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6 Andrew Murray, *Absolute Surrender* (New Kensington, PA: Bethany House Publishers, 1982), 21.

7 Gordon D. Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospel* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2006), 1.

When this gospel is preached to those who are living in poverty it immediately appeals to the defeated, fallen nature of man. The people are told all they have to do is sow a seed of faith and prosperity and success will follow. They are instructed to give as an action of sowing a seed of faith. The more they sow through their giving, the more God blesses and returns to them. Many of these preachers promise a hundredfold blessing to the people who give a certain amount. As I write this paper, one prominent prosperity preacher is promising a thousand-fold increase to everyone who will sow at least one thousand dollars into his ministry. The spirit of pride runs rampant as these preachers believe they are able to dictate what blessings will come from God.

I am in agreement with Alan Anderson when he stated, “If there is a criticism often justifiably leveled at Pentecostals and Charismatics, it is that they have sometimes expounded a theology of success and power at the expense of the theology of the cross.”<sup>8</sup> The doctrine of the cross must not be compromised. Without the cross there is no salvation message. For the prosperity preacher the message of the cross is overshadowed by the message of success and prosperity. These preachers find themselves in opposition to the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the churches in Galatia. Paul said, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14).

### **Name It and Claim It**

For the adherents of the prosperity gospel, the words ‘Name It and Claim It’ are more than a catch phrase, these words go to the very heart and soul of their theology. They believe God always rewards faith with wealth and good health. Financial blessings

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<sup>8</sup> Clifton R. Clark, Ed, *Pentecostal Theology in Africa* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 170.

are guaranteed for those who have enough faith. The prosperity theology emphasizes “that God’s promised generosity, as demonstrated with Abraham, is available for every believing Christian on earth today.”<sup>9</sup> Those who preach the prosperity gospel believe that the primary reason God made a covenant with Abraham was so he could bless Abraham with material blessings. And since we as Christians are Abraham’s spiritual children, these material blessings are passed on to us. They reinforce their teaching by using the words of the Apostle Paul when he said, “He redeemed us in order that the blessings given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit” (Galatians 3:14). This is a problem because Paul was placing emphasis on the promise of the Spirit. God has not promised material wealth to every Christian. When this theology is scrutinized by Scripture it does not hold up. We are Abraham’s spiritual children and have an inheritance of the spiritual blessings. Kenneth Copeland teaches, “Since God’s covenant has been established and prosperity is a provision of this covenant, you need to realize that prosperity belongs to you now.”<sup>10</sup> This again is a problem. This message will not preach in Haiti or in South Africa and a message that will only preach in white, upscale suburban neighborhoods is not the message for the church. Author Edward Pousson makes a valid point when he wrote, “the prosperity message is in captivity to the American Dream.”<sup>11</sup>

These prosperity advocates preach that spirituality is measured by success and material possessions. Yet there are wealthy infidels. America is entertained by wealthy actors and actresses who have become billionaires and yet they have no interest in God.

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9 Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 255.

10 Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974), 51.

11 Edward Pousson, *Spreading the Flame* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 159.

This principle that success and wealth equals spirituality cannot be found in Scripture. The prosperity preacher tells us that if you do not have wealth you are living beneath your privilege. This message is in direct conflict with the message of the Apostle Paul when he wrote, “I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (Philippians 4:12). True servants of God can relate to Paul’s message. This would include Jesus in his earthly ministry. Prosperity gospel preachers who teach that Jesus was wealthy have a hard time supporting their sermons with Scripture. In Scripture we do not find a Jesus who was robed with wealth and luxury. The Bible tells us of a Jesus who was born in a stable, a Jesus who said Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20).

As far as I know, there is not one “wealthy” individual in the congregation I pastor. But there are faithful servants of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who will never know what it is like to be wealthy in this life. The prosperity preachers boast of their wealth and condemn those who preach the New Testament doctrine of suffering and sacrifice. Jesus gave these words of instruction to his followers, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

The evidence points to a growing influence of the prosperity gospel among the Pentecostal churches here in San Antonio. Since the growth rate of this movement is so phenomenal among us, it stands to reason that the impact will only increase with time. This is why it is so important to understand and address the problems we face in dealing

with this movement. Gordon Fee exposes one of the problems we will face in dealing with this counterfeit gospel, “It is evangelism tied to the apron strings of the American profit-motive mentality.”<sup>12</sup>

Most of the “mega churches” in San Antonio promote and embrace the prosperity gospel. While these superstar preachers prey on the poor, they are also targeting the middle class who are trying to climb the ladder of success and realize the American Dream. This has become a real problem for the church. This generation, the majority of who would be identified as Generation X, is already career driven. This age group has come up in a culture of greed with expectations to live the American Dream.

The methods used by these prosperity preachers for raising money are unethical and questionable to say the least. A former member of the Word of Faith Movement and a graduate of Oral Roberts University, Michael Klassen wrote, “The secret of getting the desires of your heart, ‘we were told,’ is to tap into the divine principle God has established to govern the universe. The divine principles include:

- When you give, God will return it back to you tenfold or hundredfold.
- We have what we say, so we must speak our desires into existence.
- God’s Word never returns void, so keep on confessing God’s Word over your situation until he answers your prayer.
- And God promises prosperity to you in his Word, we can hold him to his promise.”<sup>13</sup>

As one can see, God becomes a “puppet on a string” for these teachers who minister for selfish gain. It becomes clear why the prosperity gospel would be attractive to the hard-working middle-class who are trying to get ahead. After all, they are in the driver’s seat and they have a god they control, and he is there to serve them. When they

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<sup>12</sup> Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospel*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Michael J. Klassen, *Strange Fire Holy Fire* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2009), 138.



give of their finances, they are expecting a return of tenfold or hundredfold. This is not right and it's hurting the church. It's time for us Pentecostals to ask the question posed by author Michael Brown, "How much longer can this go on?"<sup>14</sup> As leaders of the Pentecostal movement, we must challenge these charlatans and their interpretation of Scripture. In San Antonio the negative publicity concerning some of these leaders and their lavish lifestyles has had and continues to have a negative impact on the Pentecostal church. We have the repercussions from the news media, as well as from the non-Pentecostal churches, especially the fundamentalists.

Word of faith founder, Essek William Kenyon, a Baptist preacher who lived from 1867 to 1948 coined the phrase, "What I confess I possess."<sup>15</sup> This is a deceptive doctrine and must be denounced by the leadership of the Pentecostal movement.

### **A Different Gospel**

Those who promote the prosperity gospel believe there is a direct connection between good health, wealth and one's spiritual condition. Many of these prosperity preachers put a price tag on their ministry and if the amount they require is not raised, they will not go. This is becoming a real problem. The question should be asked, would Jesus have ever put a price tag on his ministry? Would the apostles have ever required a set amount for them to go where God was sending them? It becomes a problem when one searches the Scriptures to justify putting a price tag on ministry.

*Christianity Today* published an article dated September 2006 on the prosperity gospel in which they quote Rick Warren who said, "You don't measure your self-worth

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14 Michael Brown, *The End of the American Gospel Enterprise* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1993), 78.

15 John MacArthur, *Strange Fire* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Publishing, 2013), 30.

by your net worth. I can show you millions of faithful followers of Christ who live in poverty.”<sup>16</sup> In San Antonio where I pastor there are thousands of faithful servants of the Lord who are living in poverty. There are also thousands who love God and have poor health. These men and women are not spiritual paupers.

Preachers of the prosperity gospel seem to be blinded to the biblical teachings on perseverance, trial and tribulation, as well as the value of patience. They find no value, benefit or blessing in suffering for the cause of Christ. Their message is in direct conflict to the apostle James when he wrote, “Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy” (James 5:10,11). What about the words of the Apostle Paul during his imprisonment in Rome? The church at Philippi sent Epaphroditus to encourage and minister to Paul. During his time with Paul, Epaphroditus became very sick and Paul had to send him back to Philippi with these instructions for the church, “Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me” (Philippians 2:29, 30). The message of these prosperity preachers is a strange message for us Pentecostals. In light of Scripture we must be willing to take a stand and reject this false doctrine. Those who sacrifice for the cause of Christ should be honored. There are many among us like Epaphroditus who have paid a great price in order to be a blessing to someone else. Instead of honoring men and women of true faith, the prosperity crowd honors men and

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<sup>16</sup> Ted Olson, “Prosperity Gospel,” *Christianity Today*, September 14, 2006.

women of fame and fortune. This is a problem and the Pentecostal church must reject this message of the superstar preachers. These superstar preachers would have more in common with the worldly Hollywood crowd than the Pentecostal church. The church is in need of servant leaders who love God enough to sacrifice ease and comfort, fame and fortune, in order to carry the gospel to a hurting world. The church is in need of preachers who stand in their pulpits with love and compassion for those who are hurting.

In my years of serving God I have personally known faithful Christians who have walked away from good careers and promised wealth in order to be faithful to the calling God had placed upon their lives. It becomes a problem when these faithful servants are told if they were in the will of God they would accumulate wealth and riches. Jesus gave the account of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man received the good things in this life while Lazarus received the bad things, but in the life to come Lazarus received his reward (Luke 16:25).

Every Christian can say with heartfelt conviction, “I am blessed.” Yet, we realize that not all blessings come in the form of good health or material possessions. The ultimate blessing will come when those who are faithful stand before their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and hear him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of the Lord” (Matthew 25:21 NKJV). Professor Eldin Villafañe addressed this issue when he stated, “Prosperity theology is a position that in the last analysis breaks the ‘tension’ of the biblical and eschatological ‘already and not yet’ of the Kingdom of God, waiting for the consummation of the coming of Christ. Prosperity theology is a realized eschatology

that wants to enjoy totally and now the powers and benefits of the coming age.”<sup>17</sup> There is no earthly reward that could ever compare to our eternal reward of being in the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ throughout eternity.

The prosperity preachers lean heavily on a few Scriptures that are often taken out of context. One of their favorite verses is found in third John, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 2 NKJV). They place all the emphasis on the physical and tangible and very little emphasis on soul prosperity. This is a problem pastors who are faithful to God’s Word are having to address. This is important because our people are being deceived. A close reading of this verse will show that the emphasis is placed on “soul prosperity.” The followers of the prosperity gospel are taught that wealth is yours and all you have to do is name it and claim it. Another Scripture they take out of context is found in John’s Gospel, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10). These words of Jesus are used to promote the physical life even though Jesus is teaching a lesson on spiritual life. For those who believe the prosperity gospel it is about the here and now. Their mindset is having all that God has promised today. Earthly things seem to outweigh eternal things.

### **The Prosperity Gospel and Mass Appeal**

I have observed the prosperity gospel for almost 40 years as it has grown from a regional to a national, then to a global movement. It was not until I began my doctoral studies on Global Pentecostalism that I began to understand the impact and influence this

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17 Eldin Villafañe, “Pentecostal Theology: Issues and Perspectives” (Workbook received during class with Professor Villafañe, 2015), 39.

movement was having on the global scale. While I knew it had grown into a global movement, I had no idea of the phenomenal growth and success it had experienced globally. Many of the largest congregations in the world have bought into the prosperity message to some degree. One example is Joel Osteen's church, the largest church in the United States which is Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas and has a weekly attendance of 47,000 people. John Hagee preaches the prosperity gospel to the largest congregation in San Antonio, Texas, the city where I live and have pastored for the past thirty-two years. These are only two examples of the mega churches that promote the prosperity gospel. There is no doubt that the prosperity gospel has penetrated the Pentecostal church and is a force to be dealt with.

Even though the prosperity gospel or word of faith as it is sometimes called, is so popular among our people it does not make it legitimate. When examined through the lens of the New Testament it does not line up with the true gospel message. Many of these Pentecostals are drawn to the prosperity gospel because it gives them a sense of empowerment. Author Milmon Harrison sheds light on the subject in his book *Righteous Riches* when he writes, "The Word of Faith Movement offers a sense of personal, individual empowerment to those who have been left out of the mainstream of economic and social life, thus making it attractive to the poor who didn't want to stay poor in America or elsewhere, particularly in developing nations."<sup>18</sup> The poor buy into the prosperity gospel as a way to climb the ladder of success. This becomes a problem when prosperity and success do not materialize. When the promises made by these prosperity preachers do not come to pass, the people who had such high hopes of success are left

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<sup>18</sup> Milmon F Harrison, *Righteous Riches* (Oxford University Press: NY, 2005), 159.

confused and disillusioned. As a pastor I have to deal with individuals whose lives have been turned upside down by the promises these preachers have made to these believers.

While visiting an elderly member whose husband had just passed away, I was reminded how devastating this fake doctrine can be. This couple had invested their retirement into a ministry when promised that God would return their investment tenfold. The grieving widow said,

Pastor our retirement is gone. My husband had worked so hard for over forty years so that in our golden years we would not have to worry about our finances. Our retirement savings are gone and I have nothing to show for it. Pastor I have prayed and asked myself over and over again, what did I do wrong? Why did God do this to me?<sup>19</sup>

The problem always comes back to the pastor. I have seen people hurt and even offended at God when the promises they had been given did not come to pass.

Yet, with these problems people are still drawn to these ministries. Within the Charismatic/Pentecostal churches, those who promote the prosperity gospel have experienced phenomenal success numerically as well as financially. The preachers of the prosperity gospel preach a message that appeals to the people who are living in poverty, a message that offers false hope that only adds to their misery. In his book, *Cheap Grace*, Dr. Eldin Villafañe wrote, “The theology of prosperity tends to appeal to the carnal and material appetites leading to greed, which is idolatry (Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 3:5). In short, it offers a ‘cheap grace’ - which ultimately frustrates the faith of the believer and the manifestation of Divine Grace.”<sup>20</sup>

Recently, on a Sunday morning, I stepped into one of our Children’s Ministries room and it suddenly dawned on me that I was observing the fifth generation of several

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<sup>19</sup> This statement was made by an elderly member of a church this author pastored.

<sup>20</sup> Villafañe, “Pentecostal Theology: Issues and Perspectives,” 39.

of our families who are part of the congregation that I have been privileged to pastor. I then realized that each new generation is more likely to be influenced and drawn to the prosperity gospel than the previous generation. I believe there are several reasons for this, one being that most Christian television ministries and even best-selling Christian books and magazines promote this gospel. Also, each new generation seems to be more focused on “success” than previous generations. They are taught to go after the American Dream. The prosperity gospel is certainly an enticement for those who have this mindset. As a pastor, over the years I have observed those who bought into this movement because they had watched their parents or other church leaders who sacrificed wealth, comfort and even their health fulfill the call of God upon their lives. They watched as a generation would retire from appointment with no house to call their own and very little income for the years they needed it most. But the younger generation of church leaders are demanding more. They’re more concerned about financial success and security. Concerning this subject, I am in agreement with author and Bible teacher Silvanus Oluoch who wrote, “That is the reason folks have flocked to and embraced the prosperity gospel, it seems to answer those desires for them; it seems to work. This is the reason it can fill a church in no time.”<sup>21</sup>

There is a problem when the value of a ministry is judged by this standard of success. Success meaning the size of the crowds that gather or the money that is raised. Many times, the pastor of these churches live in splendor while many of those who attend live on a modest income. It is almost as if these members are playing the lottery, they continue to believe that prosperity will come.

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21 Silvanus Oluoch, *Concerning Prosperity Gospel* (Seattle, WA: Xlibris Corporation, 2012), 83.

Recently I read a chapter in Gloria Copeland's book where she states, "Prosperity is yours! It is not something you have to strive to work toward. You have a Title Deed to prosperity. Jesus bought and paid for your prosperity just like he bought and paid for your healing and your salvation."<sup>22</sup> Preachers like Kenneth and Gloria Copeland draw large crowds who are drawn to this message because it feeds the desires of the flesh. The young adults who are studying in college or entering the workforce are especially vulnerable to this false gospel. While having lunch with a young college student who felt God was calling him to go and serve as a missionary in a foreign country, he looked at me and said, "Pastor, I'd go in a minute, but what future is there in being a missionary?" Many of these career-minded young people are looking for a "benefit package" the church is not able to give, so to them the prosperity gospel is very enticing. This brings me to another reason I feel so many young people are drawn to the prosperity gospel. As leaders in the Pentecostal church, we have been too passive in addressing the false teachings promoted by these prosperity teachers. We have not put enough emphasis on teaching our people as we should. This is another reason our young ministers and leaders need seminary training.

### **Discernment**

There are many voices in the land; all are looking for an audience. At the time of the Transfiguration, Peter was looking for an audience when the voice from heaven interrupted, "This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him" (Matthew 17:5b)! If we are to have the favor of God, we must know his voice and obey when he speaks. We must also recognize those voices that are not of God. This is a major

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<sup>22</sup> Gloria Copeland, *God's Will is Prosperity* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1978), 46.



problem in the Pentecostal church at this critical time in our history, we must know how to respond to these voices. The strange voice of the prosperity gospel is being heard by many of our people. As a pastor, I have seen good men and women deceived while being caught up in the hype and glamour of the moment. As leaders we must be willing to expose this false doctrine for what it is. I am afraid we have too many pastors and leaders in our churches who do not see the danger our congregations face in coping with the prosperity theology and this is a problem.

It would be hard to overemphasize the impact the prosperity gospel has had and continues to have on our churches in Texas. The San Antonio congregation has felt the impact of this movement. Recently, after receiving an offering for our building fund I was approached by a lady who informed me that I should not be concerned about these financial matters. I was informed that all I had to do was put my faith to work and name and claim what I wanted. Later in the conversation, she informed me that she was a member of the word of faith movement and when she wanted something, she just spoke what she wanted, and God was obligated to her word of faith. As she continued to speak, I began to wonder how many people I minister to who are caught up in this false doctrine. That Sunday morning, we had just prayed for several people who were sick, and this brought her to the subject of “Divine Health.” She informed me that if I agreed she would be willing to teach our people how to be successful and experience good health. If I would have given her that freedom, this false doctrine would be taught in our church today. To show how ridiculous this doctrine is and how gullible people can be, while sitting in her wheelchair, she informed me that she was on food stamps. I informed her

that I did not believe in the prosperity gospel and it would not be promoted in our congregation.<sup>23</sup> This is a problem that is repeated over and over again.

As pastors we must be God called Shepherds who care and protect our sheep. In order to do this, we must be able to discern what voices are of God and what voice Satan uses to deceive and destroy our people. I pray daily for God to help me discern and know the voice of God. As church leaders we must be willing and able to watch and pray (Matthew 26:41). The word watch means to be alert. Without question, the prosperity doctrine is a strange doctrine in light of the New Testament doctrine. Author Stephen Eyre addresses this problem when he wrote, “The Dragon of materialism leads us to become preoccupied with the material side of life. We become practical materialists. We know that there is more to life, but the way we live shows that we have adopted the Creed of the Dragon of materialism, matter is all that matters.”<sup>24</sup>

With the prosperity gospel the attention is always given to satisfying the flesh. Words like sacrifice and suffering for the cause of Christ are never used. The preaching of the cross is for a bygone generation and has no place in this prosperous twenty-first Century church. While the preachers of the prosperity gospel offer success and material gain, they have no word to address the moral decay that is taking place throughout the land... and this is a problem. We are facing major moral issues that cannot be addressed by this phony gospel of wealth and health because the prosperity gospel is about exalting and satisfying the flesh. This is the opposite of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Pentecostal

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23 This conversation took place after a Sunday morning service in San Antonio, TX in 2017.

24 Stephen D. Eyre, *Defeating the Dragons of the – World, Resisting the Seduction of False Values* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 28.

theologian and author Gordon Fee wrote, “Despite our protests to the contrary, at its base the cult of prosperity offers a man-centered, rather than a God-centered theology.”<sup>25</sup>

The spirit of greed is contagious and innocent people are being deceived every day as they are enticed by a gospel that appeals to the flesh. As a pastor, I have observed those who were influenced by this gospel and who have bought into it. They experience very little spiritual growth. Author Silvanus Oluoch makes this point, “Instead of leading to spiritual development, it tends toward race for social status.”<sup>26</sup>

Since we are Pentecostal and believe in surrendering to the leading of the Spirit, we are more likely to give opportunity for the door to be opened for these charlatans to slip in. This is why I say one of the greatest needs in our churches today is discernment. The lack of discernment is one reason so many young people are drawn to this enticing, false doctrine. Some time ago I was attending a large gathering in our denomination and could not believe it when I heard the speaker encouraging our young people to read a certain book. This particular book was laced with prosperity theology. We are in desperate need of spiritual discernment. In the book of Revelation Jesus commends the church at Ephesus for having spiritual discernment. Jesus said, “I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them false” (Revelation 2:2b).

While I am concerned by what I see taking place in our churches, as a pastor I am encouraged when I see the commitment of some of the third and fourth generation leaders. I see them as committed to God and hungry for his Word as their parents and grandparents were. This younger generation will have an advantage over previous

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<sup>25</sup> Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospel*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Oluoch, *Concerning Prosperity Gospel*, 26.

generations because of the academic preparation to which they have access. The church has not always encouraged our leadership to prepare themselves academically. This lack of academic preparation in the Pentecostal church is one of the main reasons for our lack of discernment.

The most prominent voices we hear in Christianity today are coming through the prosperity preachers. All one has to do is turn on Christian television to hear the voice of these preachers and teachers. It would be foolish to think that this does not have an impact on our churches. One can hear it in the voices of our people who are encouraged to absorb this “so-called gospel.” Since most of the televangelists promote this prosperity gospel, this has become a real problem for those pastors who do not agree with their message. Recently I was invited to have lunch with a young pastor in San Antonio. We met in his office and he shared a very interesting story with me. Several days earlier, while listening to one of his favorite prosperity preachers, the preacher prophesied that if his congregation would sow \$10,000 into that particular television ministry, God would give him a tenfold increase. The young pastor looked at me and with all sincerity said, “God told me to tell you that you and your congregation should sow \$100,000 into my ministry.” While this may sound ridiculous, is happening all too often and this has become a problem. My answer to that young pastor was that since I did not have the same level of confidence in this certain televangelist as he did, God would need to speak directly to me.<sup>27</sup> We must have discernment.

Well-known author Jay Adams spoke wisdom when he wrote, “God doesn’t want us to throw away the good with the bad, the genuine with the false; He wants us to learn

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<sup>27</sup> This conversation took place in 2017.

to distinguish between the two.”<sup>28</sup> In this modern age, our churches are in need of church leaders like the sons of Issachar who, “understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chronicles 12:32a). God is speaking to his church today and it is imperative that we hear, understand and receive the message he has for us.

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<sup>28</sup> Jay E. Adams, *A Call to Discernment* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1987), 12.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **A Paradigm Shift from Holiness to Success**

With the growing influence of the prosperity movement within the Pentecostal church there has been a paradigm shift from the teachings of the early Pentecostal pioneers who taught and lived a life of self-denial in order to fulfill the great commission and carry out the message of Jesus Christ to the whole world. Those early Pentecostal pioneers sacrificed wealth, comfort and luxury in order to spread the gospel. They traveled over land and sea to carry the salvation message to the poor and neglected. They went to the masses who could do nothing for them except respond to their message of repentance, forgiveness, hope and salvation. In his book, *Beyond Cheap Grace*, Dr. Eldin Villafañe sheds light on the subject when he states,

The challenge to the church today - to Christian discipleship - is one that goes against the modern or postmodern mind-set; it is to have a Christian mind-set! It is to demonstrate a Christian phronesis by means of a kenosis. It is to make evident a Christian mind-set that is willing to exercise self-emptying - one that is willing to surrender its prestige, its prerogative, and yes, its power in favor of redemptive and liberating purposes.<sup>1</sup>

The prosperity gospel ushers in the mindset that Christians are here to receive all the promises of God now. One of their favorite Scriptures is from the Third Epistle of John, which they quote from the King James, “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 1:2 KJV). In studying this one verse it becomes clear that John is placing emphasis upon soul

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<sup>1</sup> Eldin Villafañe, “Pentecostal Theology: Issues and Perspectives” (Workbook received during class with Professor Villafañe, 2015), 39.

prosperity. These prosperity advocates preach a gospel that spirituality is measured by success and material possessions. In his book concerning prosperity gospel author Silvanus Oluoch states,

You cannot talk about the current prosperity gospel without talking about giving, as it is the heart and soul of the same. It's prosperity seems to depend on you and your gift; it is work based. If you give, the god of prosperity is bound to give to you in return; conversely, if you do not give, the god will ignore you! Such a god can only function within the bounds set for him by the gift, but oh, what a god who must wait for your gifts before he can know what to do!<sup>2</sup>

In drawing a contrast between the way of the cross and the prosperity gospel, author Femi Adeleye wrote, "Whereas the way of the cross points to renunciation, forsaking of opposing values, sobriety and participation in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, the new way of champagne, calls for a lifestyle committed to gullible celebration and self-indulgence with pleasures opposed to kingdom values."<sup>3</sup>

In her book, *God's Will is Prosperity*, Gloria Copeland makes this outrageous statement,

You give \$1 for the Gospel's sake and \$100 belongs to you; give \$10 and receive \$1,000; give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000. I know that you can multiply, but I want you to see in black and white how tremendous the hundredfold return is.... Give one house and receive one hundred houses or one house worth one hundred times as much. Give one airplane and receive 100 times the value of the airplanes. Give one car and the return would furnish you with a lifetime of cars. In short, Mark 10:30 is a good deal.<sup>4</sup>

It is easy to see how those who are living in poverty and are struggling just to financially survive, could be drawn to the prosperity gospel. The false promises given by these prosperity charlatans wreak havoc on a people who are already suffering. Author David Ogungbile brings out a very important point when he states, "The messages of the

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2 Silvanus Oluoch, *Concerning Prosperity Gospel* (Seattle, WA: Xlibris Corporation, 2012), 47, 48.

3 Femi Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel* (Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alive Publishers, 2011), 19, 20.

4 Gloria Copeland, *God's Will is Prosperity* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1978), 54.

prosperity gospel were always intended to change members attitude to material possessions. To the marketers, prosperity is needed to be sought after as an antidote to poverty, which is termed by the Prosperity Gospel as sickness.”<sup>5</sup>

Prosperity preachers constantly remind their audience of what God will do for them and all the benefits they inherit in their decision to follow Christ. The people are enticed to come to Jesus not because of their love for him but for the material possessions he is going to bring into their lives. In their decision to come to Jesus, the material benefits of the here and now outweigh any eternal rewards. They are constantly told that God wants them to have the best of everything. Warren Wiersbe made this timely statement:

The gospel of success tries to make us believe that God’s greatest concern is to make us happy, not to make us holy, and that He is more concerned about the physical and the material than he is about the moral and spiritual. The ‘success god’ is a celestial errand boy whose only responsibility is to respond to our every call and make sure that we are enjoying life.<sup>6</sup>

Through this teaching, God becomes the believer’s private puppet. He is there at the believer’s beckon call to fulfill their every desire. God has been reduced from his high and lofty state to becoming an errand boy for those who call upon his name. The bottom line is always prosperity and success. In his classic, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*, author Gordon Fee gives us insight into the thinking of the prosperity crowd when he states, “God wills the (financial) prosperity of every one of his children, and therefore for a Christian to be in poverty is to be outside God’s intended will; it is to

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5 David Ogunbale, “African Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel,” in *Pentecostal Theology in Africa*, ed. Clifton R. Clarke (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 142.

6 Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Integrity Crisis* (Nashville, TN: Oliver Nelson Publishers, 1988), 52.



be living a Satan-defeated life.”<sup>7</sup> Popular prosperity televangelist John Hagee, makes light of the message Jesus shared to those who were gathered in the synagogue when Jesus said that he was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor (Luke 4:18). Hagee said,

The good news to the poor is this. Christ took your poverty on the cross and gave you the riches of Abraham. Brother, that’s enough to make a Baptist get in the aisles and start dancing. The curse of poverty has been broken at the cross. If you have the anointing, you don’t have the curse of poverty. If you practice the principles of prosperity in the Word of God, this (Luke 4:18) says God will make you the head and not the tail.<sup>8</sup>

This mindset of being the head and not the tail says a great deal about those who promote the prosperity gospel. They must take center stage; the attention must be upon them and what they have accomplished.

### **The Cross, The Old or The New**

In his book, *The View from Mount Calvary*, John Phillips states, “It was the end of a long and ordained road. The rising tide of His sorrow began ere time began when, in the council chambers of eternity, he took upon Himself the role of Redeemer for a lost and ruined race.”<sup>9</sup> Phillips gives insight into the true purpose of the cross. The cross was and is an instrument of death. The individual comes to the cross and surrenders his life to Jesus Christ. This cross that exposes sin and shines the light on our depraved condition is rejected by promoters of prosperity. One of the premier, prosperity preachers, Robert Schuller wrote, “I don’t think anything has been done in the name of Christ and under the banner of Christianity that has proven more destructive to human personality and, hence, counterproductive to the evangelism enterprise than the often crude, uncouth and

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<sup>7</sup> Gordon Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2006), 8, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Hagee, John. *Praise the Lord*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, January 8, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> John Phillips, *The View from Mount Calvary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 94.

unchristian strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition.”<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Andrew Murray said, “It is to take away sin that God gave his son - that Jesus gave Himself. It is God who sets us free. Not only free from punishment, curse, uneasiness and terror, but also free from sin itself. You know that He was manifested so that He might take away our sins.”<sup>11</sup> While the prosperity crowd speaks of the cross of popularity, success and prosperity, their message of the cross cannot be supported by Scripture.

In his book, *The Radical Cross*, A. W. Tozer speaks about two crosses, the old and the new. The old cross speaks of how Jesus came to earth where he was humiliated, where he suffered and died for every man, woman, boy and girl. This cross speaks of the Lamb of God bringing salvation to a lost and dying world. Yet the prosperity preachers promote a cross that demands nothing of the believer. Speaking of the cross the prosperity crowd embraces, A. W. Tozer said, “Christianity makes no unpleasant demands; rather, it offers the same thing the world does, only on a higher level. Whatever the sin-mad world happens to be clamoring after at the moment is cleverly shown to be the very thing the gospel offers, only the religious product is better.”<sup>12</sup> In the Scriptures we are warned of false teachers who would come among God’s people and their agenda would be to introduce destructive heresies (2 Peter 2:1). These false teachers and preachers have entered the ranks of the Pentecostal church and they seem to be gaining influence and momentum daily. The Pentecostal church must have leaders who have the wisdom and courage to confront these false teachers.

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10 Dave Hunt and T.A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1985), 15.

11 Andrew Murray, *Living the New Life* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 51.

12 A. W. Tozer, *The Radical Cross* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 2005), 54.

The message of the old cross and the lifestyle it demands cannot be reconciled with the new cross and the lifestyle it births. The new cross is a cross of ease and comfort and is designed to satisfy the desires of the flesh. The old cross can be rough and rugged, and the message never changes; deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24).

The prosperity preachers with their message of the new cross cry out, come follow me to success, wealth and luxury. Many of our people are following these superstar preachers without knowing the consequence, yet there is no life in Christ, no fellowship until we come to the cross and find grace and mercy. We are cleansed and washed in the blood of Jesus, therefore we belong to him. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul addressed the subject when he wrote, “Do you know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you are bought with a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies” (1 Corinthians 16:19-20).

We were bought with the precious blood of Jesus. To the true believer, phrases such as, “I’m in charge of my own destiny” or “I’m a King’s kid” seem to be out of character to the faithful servant of God. When we surrender all to follow Jesus, we come to realize we are not in control. A friend of mine who is involved in the prosperity movement told me that we Pentecostals were trying to take the prosperity preachers out of the driver’s seat. My response was, any preacher who feels he is in the driver’s seat is being deceived. We must never compromise the message of the cross. Our message must agree with that of John when he said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). In his classroom lecture, Professor Eldin Villafañe said,

The theology of prosperity presents a God better known in ‘glory,’ in human strength and human reason, with its achievements and blessings and not known in the weakness and folly of the cross. The ‘triumphalism’ of the protagonists of prosperity theology - with its luxuries and wealth - also its overemphasis of the triumphs, victories and conquests of faith, eventually diminishes the grandeur and mystery of the cross.<sup>13</sup>

Since Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross 2000 years ago, the message of the cross has been under attack. The strategy of the enemy has been to redefine the cross by presenting a cross that is not offensive to the world and can be embraced by this sinful, fallen culture we find ourselves in today.

As a Pentecostal, the cross is the central message of the Bible. The best-known verse in the Bible speaks of the cross, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Thank God for the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who came down from his throne to bring salvation and eternal life to fallen humanity through his death on the cross. The church of these last days must identify with the Apostle Paul when he wrote, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14).

It is impossible to preach the cross without addressing the doctrine of suffering. Billy Graham said, “The cross of Jesus Christ was the culmination of the one life that held more suffering than any other in human history. His was the suffering of the entire world. Since the day of crucifixion, the cross has been the supreme symbol of salvation from sin.”<sup>14</sup> Televangelist Frederick Price conveys the attitude found among many of the prosperity preachers. Speaking of Jesus dying on the cross, he states, “Do you think that

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13 Villafañe, “Pentecostal Theology: Issues and Perspectives,” 39.

14 Billy Graham, *Hope For The Troubled Heart* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1991), 64.

the punishment for our sin was to die on the cross, the two thieves could have paid your price.”<sup>15</sup> A serious Bible student can see, there is very little regard or understanding of the purpose of the cross. But then there are men of God, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who speak of the true disciples of Christ. Bonhoeffer wrote, “Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross.”<sup>16</sup> Bonhoeffer would go on to say, “To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ.”<sup>17</sup> No one can question the love and commitment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was tortured and imprisoned, and on April 9, 1945, he was martyred for the cause of Christ.

It is sad, but the words of John Fisher are true, “The cross is a hard sell to this generation unless we soften it somehow or remove it altogether.”<sup>18</sup> The true preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ know they have a calling upon their lives to be faithful to the Word of God. These preachers of the gospel understand the words of Jesus when he said, “You are the salt of the earth; but If the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men” (Matthew 5:13 NKJV).

It was the apostle Paul who pinned the words, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:17). From the beginning of Christianity, God’s people have never been strangers to suffering. Author Michael

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15 Frederick Price, *Ever Increasing Faith Messenger* (June 1980), 7, quoted in D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 120.

16 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 87.

17 Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 88.

18 John Fisher, *On a Hill Too Far Away* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1994), 45.

Klassen said, “At times, by resisting our suffering, we may in fact find ourselves resisting God.”<sup>19</sup> We do not always understand the purpose of our suffering. In describing the faithful soldiers of the cross who suffer with Christ, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “They stand as the bearers of sorrow in the fellowship of the Crucified; they stand as strangers in the world in the power of him who was such a stranger to the world that it crucified him.”<sup>20</sup>

Those who promote the prosperity gospel cannot find God’s will in suffering. E. W. Kenyon states, “You are suffering... because you have refused your place in Christ.”<sup>21</sup> But it was the Apostle Paul who said, “That I may know him in the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10, 11 NKJV). The reality is that we live in a world where there are people suffering every day. Pain, hunger, sickness and disease are realities in the world in which we live. The church cannot afford to ignore the fact that millions of people go to bed hungry every night. We do not have to travel to some foreign country to find these people, it’s happening in our own neighborhoods. It is as Jesus said, we will always have the poor among us (Matthew 26:11).

Sometimes poverty and sickness are due to sin. As a pastor, I’ve seen families suffer because the husband and father would not work and provide for his family. I’ve also seen those who would gamble or spend their money on alcohol when their families

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19 Klassen, *Strange Fire Holy Fire*, 171.

20 Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 199.

21 Essek William Kenyon, *New Creation Realities*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Lynnwood, WA: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, 1964), 15, quoted in Judith Matta, *The Born-Again Jesus* (Fullerton, CA: Spirit of Truth, 1987), 33.

needed food and shelter. But poverty and sickness are not always due to sin. Ronald Sider wrote, “A fundamental point of the book of Job is that poverty and suffering are not always due to disobedience.”<sup>22</sup> Sider went on to say, “God frequently rewards obedience with material abundance is a clear teaching in Scripture.”<sup>23</sup> But the prosperity preachers have a real problem when the blessings of God do not come in the form of material possessions.

I am reminded of faithful men and women throughout history who lived godly lives and yet endured suffering. William Joseph Seymour, the evangelist of the Azusa Street Revival, suffered as a black man during the years of segregation. Seymour had one good eye after losing sight in the other because of smallpox. While studying for the ministry, he was not allowed to sit in the classroom with the other students because he was black. He never became wealthy in this life. And then there was Mother Theresa, known in the Catholic Church as St. Teresa of Calcutta. Mother Theresa devoted her life to helping those who could not help themselves. According to her biography, one of her favorite sayings were the words of Jesus, “Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do it to me” (Matthew 25:40). She suffered hunger and there were times when her clothes were ragged and torn, yet she remained faithful to her calling, realizing her reward was an eternal reward. Then there was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who helped the German Jews during the darkest days of World War II. Bonhoeffer knew what it meant to suffer for the cause of Christ (Philippians 1:29). His stand against Hitler and the Nazi party would eventually cost him his life. While imprisoned for his faith, he was martyred on April 9, 1945, in a concentration camp in Flossenbug, Germany. These

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22 Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians In an Age of Hunger* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 101.

23 Sider, *Rich Christians nn an Age of Hunger*, 101.

faithful servants, William Seymour, Mother Theresa and Dietrich Bonhoeffer will be remembered long after many of these prosperity preachers of wealth and comfort are forgotten. One of my favorite mentors, Eugene Weakley, had a favorite saying, “God keeps good records.” I would add, “God’s records are permanent, and they are not tainted with politics.”

A.W. Tozer said, “The Christian will feel the heat on a sweltering day; the cold will bite into his skin as certainly as into that of his unsaved neighbor; he will be affected by war and peace, booms and depressions, without regard to the spiritual state.”<sup>24</sup> Jesus modeled this for every Christian as he walked upon this earth. Jesus knew what it was like to be hungry (Matthew 4:2) and tired (John 4:6). He also knew what it was like to have no place to lay his head (Luke 9:58). J. Oswald Sanders had this to say, “Nothing moves people more than the print of the nails and the mark of the spear. Those marks are tests of sincerity that no one can challenge.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Little gods**

Who would have ever thought the Pentecostal church would have to address a heresy of this magnitude from within its own ranks? This is as much idolatry as the account in Exodus where Aaron made the golden calf for the people to worship (Exodus 32:8). While teaching on the subject of how man becomes God, Televangelist Fred Price states, “Man is the only creation of God that is in God’s class.... I believe that through these scriptures we can very clearly see that God made man a god.”<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Copeland would go on to claim that God told him, “Pray to yourself, because I’m in yourself and

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24 A. W. Tozer, *Of God and Man* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 1960), 101.

25 J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1967), 117.

26 Fred Price, Correspondence on file with Christians United for Reformation (CURE), August 25, 1982.



you're in myself. We are one Spirit, saith the Lord."<sup>27</sup> The arrogance and boldness of these false teachers bring to mind Paul's warning to Timothy of dangerous, perilous times that would come in the last days. Paul taught on how men would be lovers of themselves, proud and boastful (2 Timothy 3:1-2). In teaching on the authority of the believer, Kenneth Copeland states, "You don't have a god in you. You are one!"<sup>28</sup> This teaching is very deceptive and new converts are being added daily. I'm reminded of the wisdom of Solomon when he pinned the words, "To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech" (Proverbs 8:13).

The promoters of the prosperity gospel have lost the fear of God. In order to believe we are god, we must first demote the one true and living God. Jehovah God still hates pride and arrogance, and this is not going to change. The question must be asked, are these preachers so spiritually blind that they cannot be reached with the true gospel. The world was shocked when Jim Jones lead over nine hundred of his followers to commit suicide with him in Jonestown, Guyana on November 18, 1978. Jones, the leader of People's Temple, had taught his followers that he was Messiah and they were gods. In one of his sermons he declared,

"It is written that ye are gods. I'm a god and you're a god. And I'm a god, and I'm gonna stay a god until you recognize that you're a god. And when you recognize that you're a god, I shall go back into principle and will not appear as a personality. But until I see all of you knowing who you are, I'm going to be very much what I am - God, almighty God."<sup>29</sup>

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27 Kenneth Copeland, "Take Time to Pray", *Believer's Voice of Victory*, February 1987, 9.

28 Kenneth Copeland, "The Force of Love," tape BCC-56 (Fort Worth, TX, Kenneth Copeland), On file with Christian Research Institute (CRI).

29 "Father Cares: The Last of Jonestown," James Reston Jr. and Noah Adams, *All Things Considered*, aired April 23, 1981, on NPR.

Not only did Jim Jones suffer, but following him cost his congregation their lives. Jesus warned the people of this when he said, “If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit” (Matthew 15:14b).

### **Doctrine of Greed: Love of Money**

The sermons of the prosperity preachers always come back to this main theme, material possessions. Their elaborate budgets and lifestyles require them to milk their congregations for all they can get. As I am writing this thesis there is a prominent TV evangelist who is telling his listeners if they don’t respond with a certain amount, that runs into the millions, he is going off the air. At the same time, he boasts of his own personal wealth. I agree with Dr. Jay Adams when he states, “It is safe to say that any person or group that provides no way of making known where it’s money is going should be suspect and probably you should withhold your financial support until it provides disclosure.”<sup>30</sup> Dr. Adams went on to bring out the hidden truth when he said, “The giver is responsible to see to it that the Lord’s money, over which he has stewardship, is spent properly.”<sup>31</sup> God has placed the responsibility on those who give as well as the ministry that is receiving the offering to be faithful stewards.

Giving is a form of worship and should always honor the Lord. When we give from a heart of love and compassion to those in need, God is honored and well pleased. We should not give because we are motivated by what we might receive in return, but we should be motivated to give because of our love for God and our fellow man. Here in Texas we are trying to cope with destruction left by Hurricane Harvey. Some of our

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30 Jay E. Adams, *A Call to Discernment* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1987), 114.

31 Adams, *A Call to Discernment*, 114.

people who live on the coastal area of the state as well as the greater Houston area, have lost everything they have. Hurricane Harvey has had an impact on several million people with property loss in the billions. The last thing we need is false hope by the prosperity promoters who care not for those who are hurting but their ambition is to turn this tragedy into selfish gain for themselves. The church must have a restoration of Christian ethics in financial matters. This would mean that if \$100,000 raised for the victims of Hurricane Harvey, \$100,000 should be given to this cause. Martin Luther would turn over in his grave if he could hear some of the commercials the televangelists use today as they sell their holy water, anointing cloths, anointed angel figurines, and the list goes on and on.

Discernment is needed in our financial matters as well as doctrinal matters. In his book, *A Call to Discernment*, Dr. Jay Adams wrote,

Lack of discernment is at the root of the scandals and the consequent loss of money to the church and other truly worthy Christian causes. But of greater importance, the church and her Lord are made the butt of the world's scorn. Once again, the solution to this problem is discernment (the ability to distinguish worthy causes from unworthy causes) through the knowledge and application of biblical teaching regarding stewardship.<sup>32</sup>

Money and material possessions must not be the main focus of the church. In his article, *Send no money to Martin Luther*, Dr. Joel Nederhood wrote, "Without the Bible's disciplines, religious leaders become religious hucksters who build their own empires and feather their own nests."<sup>33</sup> In the same article, Dr. Nederhood states, "In Luther's day, one of the practices that made him indignant was that of using religion to raise money. As a German, he resented the papacy's raising money among his countrymen to create impressive architecture in Rome. The church received donations in exchange for

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<sup>32</sup> Adams, *A Call to Discernment*, 117.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Horton, ed, *The Agony of Deceit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 237.

forgiveness of sins. Priests sold indulgences, which for certain sums, would spring people free of purgatory.”<sup>34</sup> Any ministry or church that spends more time or gives more attention to “fundraisers” than to the true gospel should be rejected. Through the prosperity gospel we see a repeat of much of what was happening in Martin Luther’s day. One major difference is that there doesn’t seem to be a Martin Luther in the prosperity movement who is willing or has the courage to speak out against the financial abuse and dishonesty that is taking place within the movement. Since the dishonest practices of these televangelists cast a cloud over the entire global Pentecostal church it is incumbent upon the Pentecostal leadership to stand and with one voice be heard.

On a “Praise the Lord: Praise-a-thon” for Trinity Broadcasting Network, November 7, 2003, popular televangelist prophetess Juanita Bynum said, “You watching me and television land and you saying all I got is \$900. But I hear the Lord saying, I double-dare people that are watching me right now, this one is for you, I double-dare you to empty your checking account. If you got \$79.36, empty it out. Empty it out, at the voice of the prophet.”<sup>35</sup> Appeals such as this prey upon those who are vulnerable and spiritually insecure. They are made to feel the Lord is not pleased with them unless they obey. These prosperity preachers seem to have no concern for the hardship they place on the people. The people hearing the sermons are looking for relief from a way of life that has given them poverty and disappointment. Author David Ogungbile states, “The messages of the prosperity gospel were always intended to change members attitude to material possessions. To the marketers, prosperity is needed to be sought after as an

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34 Horton, *The Agony of Deceit*, 234.

35 Chris Teraseel Noble, “The Greatest Deception Against Christians,” Researchthetruth.com, accessed July 15, 2018, <http://www.researchthetruth.com/christian/televangelists1.html>.

antidote to poverty, which is termed by the prosperity gospel as sickness.”<sup>36</sup> This message is not found in the New Testament. In Paul’s first letter to Timothy he wrote about people who had been deceived and robbed of the truth because they believe that godliness would bring financial gain (1 Timothy 6:5). This thesis deals with those who believe and promote the prosperity gospel such as Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Frederick Price, Jesse Duplantis, Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer, and the list could go on and on. In contrast, there are those faithful servants of God who live a different life, leaving their testimony as an encouragement to the faithful. Faithful servants like Dietrich Bonhoeffer of Germany and our Mother Theresa who has had such an impact on the poor dying of India. These were faithful servants who had little of the material things that the prosperity advocates relate to success. These faithful servants were obedient to the command of Jesus and laid their treasure up in heaven where it is secure and eternal (Matthew 6:20).

During World War II, Dietrich Bonhoeffer became a martyr for the cause of Christ. Before he was executed, Bonhoeffer’s testimony would be, “I’m sure of God’s hand and guidance.... You must never doubt that I am thankful and glad to go the way which I am being led. My past life is abundantly full of God’s mercy, and, above all sin, stands the forgiving love of the crucified.”<sup>37</sup> Every modern-day church leader should study the life of men such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, especially those who promote the prosperity gospel. The words of Ronald J. Sider should send a wake-up call to every Christian. Sider wrote,

One cannot read the parable of the Rich Fool without thinking of our own society. We madly multiply sophisticated gadgets, bigger houses, fancier cars, and

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<sup>36</sup> Ogunbible, *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity*, 142.

<sup>37</sup> Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 18.

fashionable clothes - not because such things truly enrich our lives but because we are driven by an obsession for more and more. Covetousness, is striving for more and more material possessions, has become a cardinal vice of modern civilization.<sup>38</sup>

Recently there was an incident where a local pastor was helping a businessman here in San Antonio who is facing major health issues caused by stress. He is a workaholic and his doctors have warned him of the risk of stroke and heart attack if he doesn't make some lifestyle changes. He is never satisfied with what he has but is always reaching for something bigger and better. I am told he has not always been this way. He has worked hard in order to provide for his family. The pastor said that on Sunday this young man and his family would attend the morning service and they seemed to be content with the many things God had given them. But then the pastor began to see a change in his life; his priorities were not the same. Instead of being in church on Sunday morning he would be at work. Concerned about the changes taking place in the young man's life, the pastor was able to visit his workplace where they talked for over an hour. The pastor's heart was heavy as the young man opened up and began to tell his story. The young man said, "Pastor, I just don't have time for church these days. I have an opportunity to become wealthy, so all my extra time will be given to building this business." As they prayed together the pastor thought of the warning Jesus gave concerning greed. He warned the people to be on their guard concerning all kinds of greed and that material possessions would not fill the void in their lives (Luke 12:15).

After the visit the pastor only heard from this businessman on special occasions. Today the pastor received a call to see if they could meet. The pastor was glad to hear from him and looked forward to their meeting. When the man arrived, he seemed to be

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38 Sider, *Rich Christians In a Age of Hunger*, 98.

somewhat confused and weary. He told the pastor of a doctor's report and how he needed God's help. For the first time he admitted that he coveted things he did not have. The pastor inquired as to when this started happening in his life and was shocked at his answer. He shared that he and a business associate had attended a prosperity seminar in San Antonio and the teacher taught on the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. He left the seminar believing it was God's will for him to be wealthy. This has cost him his relationship with God as well as a dysfunctional family. The major health issues have been building for some time. After spending time in prayer and sharing with him, the pastor reminded him of the words of Jesus, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24 NKJV).

This obsession for more and more material possessions is a doctrine the prosperity teachers readily promote and embrace. Instead of a doctrine of grace and mercy, they promote the doctrine of greed and covetousness. Author and teacher Hank Hanegraaff wrote, "Prosperity preachers are so committed to presenting a Jesus who wears a Rolex that they are willing to do whatever it takes to sell the myth to their parishioners."<sup>39</sup> It is obvious that these preachers have conformed to the pattern of the world (Romans 12:2). In his book, *Consecrated to God*, Andrew Murray wrote, "The world asks what a man owns; Christ asks how he uses what he owns. The world thinks more about the getting of money; Christ thinks about the giving of it. When a man gives, the world wants to know what he gets, while Christ wants to know how he gives. The world looks at the money and its amount; Christ looks at the man and his motive."<sup>40</sup>

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39 Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity In Crisis* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 201.

40 Andrew Murray, *Consecrated to God* (London, England: Marshall Pickering, 1990), 27.

James sheds light on the discrimination taking place in the first century church between the rich and the poor, a problem that we still face in the twenty-first century church. James wrote, “has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him” (James 2:5). But the founder, and advocate for the prosperity gospel has this to say, “Full, rich and abounding health is the normal and the natural condition of life. Anything else is an abnormal condition, and abnormal conditions as a rule come through perversions. God never created sickness, suffering and disease; they are man’s own creations. They come through his violating the laws under which he lives.”<sup>41</sup> This gospel does not stand up under the scrutiny of Scripture. In my own mission work to countries like El Salvador where dedicated servants of God live in one room, makeshift buildings with dirt floors, or Cuba where the people live under a repressive government, these precious people live godly lives and yet live in poverty.

The author of *The End of the American Gospel Enterprise*, Michael Brown wrote, “We have milked the body for money and used His Word to state our claims. We have mastered the ‘free will’ offering with deals no one could refuse. And we have appealed to man’s greediest motives, promising instant ‘hundred-fold returns.’ Paul spoke of men with corrupt minds who ‘think that godliness is a means of financial gain’ (1 Timothy 6:5). How much longer can this go on?”<sup>42</sup> This message Paul had for Timothy two thousand years ago is needed desperately in the Pentecostal church today. The

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41 Essek William Kenyon, *Jesus the Healer* (Seattle, WA: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, 1943), 44.

42 Michael Brown, *The End of the American Gospel Enterprise* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1993), 78.



Pentecostal church must return to her roots, a heritage where people are more important than material possessions. The gospel of greed must be eradicated from our midst.

### **Godliness with Contentment Equals Great Gain (1 Timothy 6:6)**

The prosperity gospel has penetrated the Pentecostal church at an alarming rate. There is evidence that much of the growth among the English-speaking Pentecostals in North America is due to the phenomenal growth of the Word of Faith or better known as the prosperity movement. Their message is appealing to those who have hopes of living the American dream. After all, they are taught that Jesus died on the cross so they could have abundant life here and now. The emphasis is not so much on spiritual abundance as it is on material wealth. If one follows the formula given by the prosperity preachers, he or she is promised health, wealth, and success.

Televangelists who enjoy superstar status have brought the prosperity gospel to the forefront. Millions of people watch these preachers perform each week and hear the outrageous promises of prosperity and success. In addressing this problem, author Silvanus Oluoch speaks of how this counterfeit gospel fills a void left by the traditional churches when he writes, “It seemed to be practical in fulfilling people’s immediate needs by giving them hope that seemingly changes their circumstances. That is, it seemed to be working for them, oriented toward good earthly life.”<sup>43</sup> The promises that are made deal with the here and now which appeals to those who are looking for answers today. Of course, the promises always come back to money and giving. Those who are buying into the prosperity gospel must give in order to receive the “financial miracles.” Televangelist Marilyn Hickey challenged her audience by asking them what they needed. She went on

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<sup>43</sup> Oluoch, *Concerning Prosperity Gospel*, 84.

to say, “Start speaking about it. Start speaking it into being. Speak to your billfold. Say, ‘You big, thick billfold full of money.’ Speak to your checkbook. Say, ‘You, checkbook, you. You’ve never been so prosperous since I owned you.’ You’re just jammed full of money.”<sup>44</sup> It’s not hard to see how this message would appeal to those who are trying to stretch their paychecks in order to survive.

I agree with Silvanus Oluoch when he speaks of the prosperity gospel filling a void left by the traditional churches. I am convinced we Pentecostals have not been as diligent as we should have been in teaching on what it means to be a good steward. We must be willing to preach and teach against the dangers of trying to follow Jesus for material gain. Evangelist Billy Graham tells of a conversation his wife Ruth had with a young Christian lady who had just arrived in America. She had come from a country where the government is hostile to Christianity. This young Christian told Ruth, “I think it is more difficult to remain a deeply committed Christian in the midst of prosperity than under persecution.”<sup>45</sup> Billy Graham went on to say, “Materialism may do what a foreign invader could never hope to achieve—materialism robs a nation of its spiritual strength.”<sup>46</sup>

The selective and deceptive practices of some of the primetime promoters of the health and wealth gospel can leave those who have bought into this so-called gospel confused and disillusioned. I am in agreement with author Warren Wiersbe who states,

The success preachers give us a distorted view of God, of the Saviour, of the Christian life and also of the church. According to them the church of Jesus Christ is a gathering of happy people who are enjoying life. According to my Bible, the church is a gathering of hurting people who are seeking to be whole before God

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44 Marilyn Hickey, *Claim Your Miracles* (Denver, CO: Marilyn Hickey Ministries, n.d.) Audiotape #186, side 2.

45 Graham, *Hope For The Troubled Heart*, 11.

46 Graham, *Hope For The Troubled Heart*, 11.

and helpful to a needy world. Yes, there ought to be celebration of joy when the church meets to worship; but there must also be sharing of burdens, the washing of wounds, and the healing of broken hearts. But according to the success gospel, Christians shouldn't be hurting at all.<sup>47</sup>

No matter what picture is painted by the prosperity group, the fact remains that this twenty-first Century church is filled with hurting people. The pastors and congregations who choose to minister only to the "successful" and turn away from the poor and those who are suffering, will find it hard to identify with Jesus Christ and the first century church. They will have trouble singing the old hymn, "This world is not my home, I'm just passing through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue."<sup>48</sup>

### **The Divine Health Fallacy**

As a Pentecostal I believe in divine healing. God still works miracles and that includes miracles of healing. But I also know that I live in a world filled with suffering, disease and death. I am in agreement with the document the Assembly of God drafted stating their position on divine healing and how it is an aspect of the full gospel. The document went on to caution people "against presuming that physical healing is a guarantee for those who have the faith, and has located the doctrine in the eschatological context of the resurrection, which is the ultimate fulfillment of healing."<sup>49</sup> But the founder of the Word of Faith movement, E. W. Keyon had this to say, "I know I am healed because he said that I am healed and it makes no difference what the symptoms may be in the body. I laugh at them and in the Name of Jesus I command the author of

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47 Wiersbe, *The Integrity Crisis*, 52.

48 P. May, *Banner Hymns* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Pub. House, 1957), 370.

49 F. D. Macchia, "Divine Healing" *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, Editor Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 1135.

the disease (Satan) to leave my body.”<sup>50</sup> I realize this is and has been a controversial subject in Christianity for centuries. Former Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. C. Everett Koop, had this to say, “Disease and death are ‘givens’ in this fallen world. They are the expectation. All will be straightened out only after the return of Jesus Christ—and not before.”<sup>51</sup> With the different viewpoints in mind, we must always remember that God is sovereign. The faith one has does not guarantee that God always heals his body. If it is God’s will that we always be in good health, then Paul should have addressed this issue when he wrote his letter to the church at Philippi as he was sending Epaphroditus home since he was sick and almost died (Phil 2:25-27). Paul went on to inform the Saints at Philippi that Epaphroditus should be honored because he had suffered for the work of Christ (Philippians 2:29-30).

Over the years I have been privileged to pastor many faithful servants of God who suffered from sickness and disease. Their sickness and disease were not a lack of faith but a testimony that God is sovereign. I was privileged to pastor Deacon Alvis Hunter who suffered from heart problems for forty years. He had a ministry of encouraging others who were sick or facing major health issues. He would go on hospital visitation with me when he would be so weak by the time we walked to the room of the sick person he would sit in a chair and pray for and encourage the individual. On one occasion we were visiting an individual who was dying of cancer, when Deacon Hunter took the dying brother by the hand and began singing the old hymn, “This world is not my home, I’m

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50 Essek William Kenyon, *The Hidden Man: An Unveiling of the Subconscious Mind* (Seattle, WA: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, 1969), 99.

51 Everett C. Koop, *Faith – Healing and the Sovereignty of God*, ed. Michael Horton (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1990), 174.

only passing by, my treasures and my hope are all up in the sky; and I can't feel at home in this world anymore.”<sup>52</sup>

Deacon Alvis Hunter has gone on to his reward. Even though he served the Lord faithfully for many years, he was not healed of his heart condition in this life. This story could be repeated again and again with faithful servants of Jesus Christ who were and are continuously battling health issues. Kenneth Copeland, an advocate for divine health, tells his audience, “You have a covenant with Almighty God, and one of your covenant rights is the right to a healthy body.”<sup>53</sup> Benny Hinn would go on to say, “If your body belongs to God, it does not and cannot belong to sickness.”<sup>54</sup> The promoters of divine health build their belief on a few favorite Scriptures and seem to ignore that the human race, including Christians, are not living out their lives in the Garden of Eden. Theologian Gordon Fee, a Pentecostal himself, brings balance to the subject when he states, “God is revealed to have limitless power and resources; he regularly shows himself strong on behalf of his people. Yet his people still live out their Redeemed lives in a fallen world, where the whole creation, including the human body, is in ‘bondage to decay’ (Romans 8:21), and will continue to be so until we receive ‘the redemption of our bodies’” (8:23).<sup>55</sup>

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52 May, *Banner Hymns*, 370.

53 Kenneth Copeland, *Healed...to Be or Not to Be* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1979), 25.

54 Benny Hinn, *Rise and be Healed* (Orlando, FL: Celebration Publishers, 1991), 62.

55 Fee, *The Disease of the Health & Wealth Gospels*, 27.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **Counterfeit Faith**

One of the misconceptions of the word of faith or prosperity preachers is how they read Hebrews 11:3, which states, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Hebrews 11:3 KJV). This is from the King James because this seems to be their favorite translation. They believe that God had to operate in faith in order to create all things. The words “through faith” apply to us rather than God. But the prosperity preachers are convinced that God has to operate in faith, just as we do. Kenneth Hagin makes this clear when he said,

Did you ever stop to think of having faith in your own faith? Evidently God had faith in His faith because He spoke words of faith and they came to pass... In other words, having faith in your word is having Faith in your faith. That’s what you’ve got to learn to do to get things from God: Have faith in your faith.<sup>1</sup>

According to Hagin, God is only omnipotent through faith. But the author of Hebrews says that he sustains all things by his word (Hebrews 1:6). Hagin, Copeland, and others believe God had to depend on His faith in order to accomplish His will. Yet, the Scriptures do not bear this out. The account of the creation in Genesis states,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light (Genesis 1:1-3 NKJV).

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Hagin, *Having Faith in Your Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Faith Library, 1980), 62.

Throughout the creation process there is no mention of faith. The word faith does not appear until after God has created all things. Televangelist Rod Parsley had this to say:

Why does God say, 'Ask of me'? Why does He say that? Because He can't do it on His own! He can't get what He wants on His own because He placed you in authority on this earth. Did you hear me?<sup>2</sup>

Again, God is dependent on the faith of the believer. While it is necessary for the believer to have faith, according to Scripture, faith is dependent on love. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul said, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1, 2 NKJV). Paul continued by saying, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13 NKJV). While the greatest of these is love, the prosperity preachers place a greater emphasis and importance on faith. There is so much emphasis on faith that God is limited to what he can do without our faith. God seems to be dependent on the creature rather than the creature being dependent on God.

A few months ago, I had the privilege of meeting with a young minister who had just bought into the prosperity movement. From where we were sitting, we could see my 2013 Toyota Tundra parked in the lot next door. We could also see the new truck he had just purchased. He tried to convince me that if I had the faith, I could park my used Toyota and drive off in a new vehicle of my choice. It was sad, but all the young man had on his mind was material possessions. He would always bring the subject back to tangible, earthly things. My mind went to the words of Paul when he said,

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<sup>2</sup> Rod Parsley, *Praise the Lord*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, August 7, 2003.

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:6-10 NKJV).

The words of Paul should challenge this twenty-first Century church. Many people have lost their joy and peace of mind over greed, always desiring those things they do not have and do not need. Those who desire to be rich do fall into temptation and snare (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

Two weeks ago, I received a call from the young minister I referred to earlier. Today he is confused and disillusioned because he believed he could have whatever he wanted if he had the faith. His new truck is being repossessed and there is trouble in the home. My prayer is that he doesn't give up on God. This is just one more example of what eventually happens with those who are deceived by the false gospel of prosperity.

In his book, *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote,

By sheer grace, God will not permit us to live even for a brief period in a dream world. He does not abandon us to those rapturous experiences and lofty moods that come over us like a dream. God is not a God of the emotions but the God of truth. Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it. The sooner this shock of disillusionment comes to an individual and to a community the better for both. A community which cannot bear and cannot survive such a crisis, which insists upon keeping its illusion when it should be shattered, permanently loses in that moment the promise of Christian community.<sup>3</sup>

Bonhoeffer speaks of living out our salvation in the real world with all its problems and imperfections. There is a contrast between the message of Bonhoeffer and that of the prosperity preachers. Prosperity preacher Charles Capps claims God spoke to him in this

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<sup>3</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954), 27.



revelation and said, “If men would believe me, long prayers are not necessary. Just speaking the word will bring what you desire. My creative power is given to man in word form. I have ceased for a time from my creative work and have given man the book of *My Creative Power*. That power is still in My Word.”<sup>4</sup>

These preachers really believe they have been given creative power. If they have enough faith and exercise that faith, they have the ability to speak things into existence. They believe if you want money you speak to your billfold, if you want good health speak to your body. This is completely contrary to the Word of God. The Apostle John, speaking of Jesus and the incarnation had this to say, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:1-3). Prosperity preachers believe when Jesus ascended, he relinquished his authority to those with faith and therefore they speak creative words. Kenneth Hagin wrote, “When Christ ascended, he transferred his authority to the church.”<sup>5</sup>

According to this teaching the modern-day church is in trouble. But after the resurrection Jesus met with his disciples and his first words were, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18). Nowhere in Scripture do I find where Jesus relinquished his authority on earth. It has been the teachings throughout the centuries that Jesus will return to earth again to rule and reign in power and authority. Before Kenyon, Hagin, Copeland, or any of the other promoters of the prosperity gospel made their appearance on planet Earth, the church was celebrating as they would sing the

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4 Charles Capps, *My Creative Power Will Work for You* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison, 1976), 56.

5 Kenneth Hagin, *Authority of the Believer* (Tulsa, OK: Faith Library, 1967), 11.

old hymn, “Our Lord’s Return to Earth Again.” The hymn was written in 1894 by James M. Kirk and the course goes like this,

Oh, our Lord is coming back to earth again.  
Yes, our Lord is coming back to earth again  
Satan will be bound a thousand years;  
We’ll have no tempter then, after Jesus shall come back to earth again.<sup>6</sup>

Scripture teaches that Jesus gave his disciples authority to carry out their mission on earth (Matthew 10:1). However, this does not mean that we are in charge or that we have “power of attorney” as the prosperity preachers say. Speaking of Jesus, in his letter to the brethren at Colossae, Paul wrote, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is above all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:15-18 NKJV).

According to this verse all creation was created by Him and for Him. He is to have preeminence. He is first and His glory He will not share. The Prophet Isaiah had this to say, “I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another” (Isaiah 42:8a). Don McConnell, who is a former adjunct professor of Theology at Oral Roberts University, had this to say about true Biblical faith, “Although there is much that is praiseworthy about its emphasis on faith, the Faith theology ultimately advocates faith in a god other than the God of the Bible. That the Faith god is the god of metaphysics

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<sup>6</sup> May, *Banner Hymns*, 327.

becomes evident from its view that spiritual laws rule the universe, not God.”<sup>7</sup>

McConnell sheds further light on the subject, “Jesus did, indeed, promise his disciples that, ‘if you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it’ (John 14:14) but his promise was not unqualified. It requires believers to abide in him and allow his words to abide in them (John 15:7). It requires them to keep his Commandments (1 John 3:22). It requires them to pray according to his will (1 John 5:14, 15). While it is evident that the prosperity gospel takes liberty with Bible interpretation in order to make the Scripture support the doctrine of faith, we should be reminded of the words of Paul to Timothy, “Do your best to present yourselves to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

As believers we must be careful how we handle the word of truth. The doctrine of faith is found throughout Scripture. God’s blessings to his people are real and God does require faith from his people. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus taught his disciples that he would supply your needs. He instructed them not to worry about food and clothing, the necessities of life (Matthew 6:22-32). He placed a greater emphasis on spiritual matters. Jesus said, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). Writing to the Saints at Philippi, Paul said, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

True faith, Bible faith is precious. The writer of Hebrews wrote, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony” (Hebrews 11:1,2 NKJV). Faith in faith does not work but

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<sup>7</sup> Dan R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 1995), 140.

when we place our faith in Jesus Christ and what he did for us on the cross we are blessed. We must always remember that our blessings do not always come in the form of material possessions.

### **Abrahamic Covenant**

In his letter to the Galatians Paul addresses the subject of redemption through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. In referring to what Jesus accomplished at the cross, Paul wrote, “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit” (Galatians 3:14). This is one of the favorite Scriptures the proponents of the prosperity gospel use to prove their teaching on success and prosperity. They teach that the believer has access to the material blessings of Abraham as well as the spiritual. They believe the spiritual condition of the believer can be judged by their material success. According to Kenneth Hagin those who are living in poverty are living outside God’s will. In his book, *New Thresholds of Faith*, Hagin wrote, “He wants His children to eat the best, He wants them to wear the best clothing, He wants them to drive the best cars, and He wants them to have the best of everything.”<sup>8</sup> Hagin as well as others who promote the prosperity gospel believe they have access to the full benefits of the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 12. In God’s call to Abraham, if he would walk in faith and obedience certain promises were made that included, “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:2,3). The prosperity preachers believed that these

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8 Kenneth Hagin, *New Thresholds of Faith*, (Tulsa OK: Faith Library, 1980), 54-55.

promises of power and wealth that God had promised Abraham are for the twenty-first Century believer who has enough faith to receive them. According to Televangelist John Hagee, the Abrahamic covenant gives the believer access to “wells that you did not dig,” and “he will give you vineyards you did not plant and houses you did not build.” He went on to say, “When Satan comes to you and attacks you, God will make the devil give it back to you seven times over.”<sup>9</sup> Fred Price, another popular preacher of the prosperity gospel said, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law that the blessings of Abraham might come upon us.” He explains these blessings as, “cattle, gold, and manservants, maidservants, camels, and asses. Abraham was blessed materially.”<sup>10</sup> It seems the message of these prosperity promoters is taken from teachings and principles of the Old Covenant. When Paul referred to the blessings of Abraham coming to the Gentiles through what was accomplished at the cross, he was speaking of spiritual blessings (Galatians 3:14). He was addressing the redeemed receiving the promise of the Spirit. The covenant God made with Abraham was to Israel, His chosen people. As Gentiles, we can lay claim to being the seed of Abraham, not of the Old Testament Covenant, but of the new. Our entitlements, under the New Covenant of grace are spiritual benefits. Paul addresses this subject in his letter to the Saints at Rome. Concerning the Jews, Paul said, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2:28, 29 KJV).

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<sup>9</sup> John Hagee, *Praise The Lord*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, January 8, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick K. C. Price, *Prosperity on God's Terms* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House, 1990), 36-37.

As Gentiles we can lay claim to the spiritual blessings of Abraham. The physical entitlements under the Old Covenant become spiritual under the New Covenant. Our circumcision is of the heart. For the prosperity preachers however, the emphasis always seems to be on the physical, material benefits. Addressing the subject, Dr. Jeffrey Bowens had this to say:

However, a new covenant believer can attain a prosperous life that doesn't necessarily concentrate on being wealthy. Preferably, prosperity should not focus on wealth but being able to meet one's financial obligations, having a piece of mind, cultivating a functional family, maintaining a healthy lifestyle and being able to assist those who are in distress is a prototype of a prosperous and blessed life.<sup>11</sup>

We are a blessed people and the greatest blessings are not always tangible or physical. Psalms 128 should encourage every believer:

Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to him. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around the table. Yes, this will be the blessing for the man who fears the Lord. May the Lord bless you from Zion; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. May you live to see your children's children – peace be on Israel (Psalms. 128:1-6).

While addressing the prosperity gospel and the problems we face in confronting this counterfeit gospel, I am reminded daily of the many blessings I receive from the Lord. These blessings are real and there is no need to make false promises that cannot be supported by Scripture. Blessings of life, health and strength, joy and peace, are greater than all the financial wealth of the world.

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11 Jeffery B. Bowens, *Prosperity Gospel* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2012), 62.

## **Revelation Knowledge**

Recently I was given a tape of a revival service that took place in a Pentecostal church that has been in the city for over fifty years. A visiting local preacher was scheduled to preach every night except the last night of the revival. For the last night, billed as the main event, an out of town evangelist was brought in as speaker. The church advertised the last night of the revival as miracle night. The digital church sign flashed this message, “Come and Receive Your Miracle Tonight. The evangelist with the healing anointing will be here one night only.” The day, schedule and name were then given. The service started at 7 PM, and by 6 PM people were filling the auditorium. Later the report would be given that there was standing room only. When the preacher was introduced, he informed the congregation that he had a new word from the Holy Spirit. He then informed the congregation to close their Bibles because the message he had was new and they were the first to hear this new word from the Lord. At the close of the service all the other preachers were called to the front of the building where he would lay hands on them and they would receive this new anointing. These preachers were then told if they did not come forward, they would never receive this new anointing. As I listened to the tape I thought of the words of Paul to the churches in Galatia, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an Angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse” (Galatians 1:6-8). There can be no doubt that the prosperity advocates have sowed discord and have caused confusion in the Pentecostal church.

Their desire is to pervert the true gospel of Jesus Christ. These preachers feel they are worthy of the honor and glory that only God deserves. It was E.W. Kenyon who said,

Now we are moving into the big things.... I said softly as I walked into prayer meeting. We are coming into the spiritual redwoods. We are going to see spiritual giants, supermen. They have God dwelling in them.... They no longer walk as natural men. They belong to the love class, the miracle class. They are in the Jesus class. They have graduated from the lower-class.<sup>12</sup>

But Paul had this to say, “For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you” (Romans 12:3).

In their pursuit of revelation knowledge, they seem to be less dependent on book knowledge. There is no need to search the Scripture because God is speaking a word into your spirit. During a Bible study a young lady referred to Romans eight where Paul said, “Knowledge puffs up while love builds up” (Romans 8:1b). She went on to explain that we need love, not knowledge. To this new convert it was either love or knowledge. This same attitude has not only influenced those who promote the prosperity gospel but Pentecostalism as a whole, however when Jesus was asked which of the Commandments was most important, he said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). It is important that Jesus included the mind as a way to love him. The believer is instructed to love God with his whole being. When revelation knowledge contradicts Scripture, there is a problem. When the preacher says I have a word from the Lord, seldom is this word supported by Scripture and that is a problem.

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12 Essek William Kenyon, *Identification: A Romance in Redemption* (Seattle, WA: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, 1968), 61, 62.



There should always be a dependency upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to help the believer better understand the Word of God. He enables and empowers the believer. The Holy Spirit does not give revelation that is not supported by Scripture. When speaking of the Holy Spirit Jesus said, “The helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26 NKJV).

### **Set the Captives Free**

While the prosperity crowd boasts of their wealth, their comfort and life of ease, there is a hurting world just outside their doors. There are children who will go to bed hungry tonight. As I listened to the six o'clock news there was a reporter who spoke to city officials that were concerned for the homeless who would sleep outdoors with very little protection from the cold. There was a news clip of a mother with small children who had her utilities turned off because she had no money to pay the monthly bill. Earlier today I received a call concerning someone who had just lost their job. I also received a call a few days ago of a young man at University Hospital who has been in a coma for months. His mother has been sitting by his side day and night praying for a miracle. This is the real world in which we live. A world where people are hurting and need help.

I have often thought if these prosperity preachers would drive through the poorer sections of their cities, the slums and the ghettos, maybe they could understand what's going on in this world filled with people who are suffering and in need of help. I think of those who turn away from the poor and downtrodden in order to hoard their silver and gold, and I'm reminded of the words of Jesus when he said, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be

satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh” (Luke 6:20-22). Jesus continues his discord as he warns his disciples of the danger associated with riches and comfort as he draws a contrast between the rich and the poor, “But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep” (Luke 6:24-25).

I am not advocating that it’s wrong to be successful or have wealth. But I must never forget that it is God who gives me the ability to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18), God does not give his children the ability to accumulate wealth without purpose. Those who have been blessed with wealth are called upon to help those who are less fortunate. Those who are wealthy are called upon to extend a helping hand to those who have been oppressed by the fallen systems and structures of their world. Pastor and community organizer Raymond Rivera states,

Not just the rich, but also the systems and structures we participate in oppress the poor and needy. And it is not just worldly people and systems. Regrettably, Christians and the church as an institution have perpetuated this treatment toward the least in our society. So how do we remedy this individualistic and indifferent attitude exercised by too many in the body of Christ? By accepting the call to minister in captivity.<sup>13</sup>

Pastor Rivera makes the point that people are suffering and living in poverty because of the systems and structures we participate in. They are not suffering because there is sin in their lives nor are they suffering because they are disobeying God. This theology of the prosperity preacher that all believers are to experience prosperity in this life cannot be supported by Scripture.

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13 Raymond Rivera, *Liberty to the Captives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdman's Publishing, 2012), 24.

As Paul traveled in his missionary work, he received offerings for the poor who lived in Jerusalem. After a period of time he returned to Jerusalem to help those in need. In Luke's account of Paul's activity, he states, "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings" (Acts 24:17). Paul's example is for every believer and those with influence and wealth are in a great position to help the poor. But the father of this prosperity movement, E.W. Kenyon said, "It is abnormal for believers to be in bondage to poverty so that they have to go to the world for help."<sup>14</sup> The prophet Isaiah speaks of the rebellion of God's people and why he has not honored their fasting and answered their prayers. Isaiah wrote, "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to lose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood (Isaiah 58:6,7)? The message Isaiah had around 700 BC is certainly relevant for this twenty-first Century church. God had rejected the fast because those who were in a position to lighten the burden and show the love and concern to their fellow man had refused to do so. They were religious in their fasting, but it was all external. According to Paul we are to "carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). The prosperity preachers lean heavily on Genesis chapter twelve where God calls and blesses Abraham, but they give little attention to the words, "you will be a blessing"(Genesis 12:2b). Of course, it seems as if they believe they are being a blessing by taking the people's money, yet they show little concern for the hardships they cause those who give more than they can afford to give.

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<sup>14</sup> Essek William Kenyon, *Jesus the Healer* (Seattle, WA: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1943), 173.

## **Misreading the Scripture**

In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he gives a stern warning concerning those who would be careless and deceitful when handling the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). He saw the danger and false doctrine spreading throughout the body. Paul said, "Their teaching will spread like gangrene" (2 Timothy 2:17). Gangrene is a dangerous infection and if it goes unchecked, an individual can lose a limb or even his life. If the gangrene is ignored, it continues to spread. Yet, the prosperity preachers pay little heed to the warnings given in Scripture. A good example would be John Hagee claiming that the Jews did not reject Jesus as their Messiah. Speaking of Israel, Hagee said, "The Jewish people wanted him (Jesus) to be their Messiah, but he absolutely refused. The Jews were not rejecting Jesus as Messiah; it was Jesus who was refusing to be the Messiah to the Jews."<sup>15</sup> However the Scripture teaches, "He came unto His own, and His own did not receive Him (John 1:11). In Luke's Gospel Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing" (Luke 13:34 NKJV). Every preacher is obligated to handle the word of God with care. Preachers are the messengers and the message proclaimed must be the same message found in Scripture. Author Silvanus Oluoch has this to say about those who preach the prosperity gospel, "Scripture to some of them is looked at as a treasure field filled with good, but hidden promises. As a result, reading the Scriptures only becomes a treasure (promises) hunt adventure. They read only to find God's promises for their

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<sup>15</sup> John Hagee, *In Defence of Israel* (Lake Mary, FL: Front Line, 2007), 136.

particular wants and desires.”<sup>16</sup> I am in agreement with Silvanus Oluoch. While these preachers are searching for prestige, comfort and earthly riches, there are also those who are searching for spiritual wealth, wealth that goes beyond the here and now. The Prophet Jeremiah warned the people of his day not to distort the Word of God. A prophet, priest or anyone who claims “this message is from the Lord” must know this is the message the Lord has given (Jeremiah 23:34-35). Jeremiah went on with this warning to say, “You must not mention ‘a message from the Lord’ again, because each one’s word becomes their own message” (Jeremiah 23:36a). Today as I listened to Joseph Prince, a young televangelist with a large following, he was speaking of his authority as a Christian. Then in his prayer he said, “I pray against the aging process, I will not get old and I will live to be one hundred and twenty.”<sup>17</sup> This is the problem Jeremiah was addressing when he spoke of one’s word becoming his message (Jeremiah 23:36). It seems that the prosperity preacher is convinced the authority is in his or her word. But the authority is not in their word, it is only in the Word of God. The will of the preacher and the will of God are not always the same. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9,10). And yet, the prosperity preachers condemn those who pray if it be the Lord’s will. It seems Joseph Prince should read Paul’s message to the church at Corinth when he said, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

A favorite Scripture of the prosperity preacher is the words of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken

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16 Oluoch, *Concerning Prosperity Gospel*, 111.

17 Joseph Prince, “Destined to Reign,” Hillsong Channel, January 8, 2018.

together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38). This verse is often used when the preacher is instructing his audience to give. It is taken out of context because Jesus is not teaching on money. His message is on faulty judging and how we are to forgive one another. Jesus is teaching on relationships within the Body of Christ. This Scripture in Luke is a good example of how these preachers will twist the Scriptures in order to “swell” the offering. The people are told they can expect a tenfold or hundredfold return on the money. In order to raise more money for Trinity Broadcasting Network, Televangelist John Avanzini, tells the audience that the widow Jesus spoke of in Mark 12:44 gave because she expected something from the Lord in return. He stressed the point that she gave “because she wanted something from her God.”<sup>18</sup> But this is not the message Jesus was teaching. Jesus observed as the people came forward to put their money into the temple treasury. Jesus said, “They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of poverty, putting everything—all she had to live on” (Mark 12:44). When examining the Scripture, there is nothing said about the widow wanting or expecting something in return. Avanzini seems to believe he has a new revelation on this passage that the church has been unaware of for all these centuries.

While preparing to pour concrete for a project I was doing at the church recently, I was approached by a young minister who just stopped by to visit. It was a cloudy day and I shared with him my desire to pour the concrete before the rain. I was not prepared for what followed. He stood up, raised both hands and demanded the clouds to disappear. He then informed me to continue my project since there would be no rain. A few minutes

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18 John Avanzini, *Praise the Lord: Praise-a-Thon*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, November 5, 1990.

later we are forced to go inside the building to get out of the downpour. I then asked this young man, twenty-two years old, how he came up with that nonsense of controlling the weather. He had watched a video on YouTube of a message Gloria Copeland had preached where she said the believer had authority over the weather. I took my iPad and pulled up the video of Gloria Copeland and sure enough she said her husband Kenneth Copeland has authority over the weather and when he was not there she took authority over the weather. She then instructed her audience to take authority over the weather.<sup>19</sup> The young minister was confused and disappointed with his inability to control the weather. These prosperity preachers such as Kenneth and Gloria Copeland don't seem to realize the negative influence they have, especially on this younger generation. I asked the young minister to read the words of the Prophet Nahum where he spoke of God having his way in the storm (Nahum 1:3). I then encouraged him to get into a good Bible study where the Word of God is taught as it should be.

If there is not a proper exegesis of Scripture we will find ourselves preaching a strange gospel that is not found in the Bible. An example is E.W. Kenyon saying, "When we pray in Jesus Name we are taking the place of the absent Christ: we are using his name, his authority, to carry out his will on earth."<sup>20</sup> Anytime a preacher begins to believe he is taking the place of Christ, he is in trouble. When Jesus was preparing his disciples of his departure, he said, "Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am

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19 Gloria Copeland, "Word of Faith Healer Gloria Copeland claims ability to control the weather," Kenneth Copeland Ministries, accessed July 28, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKiKf8isLG8&feature=youtu.be>.

20 Essek William Kenyon, *The Wonderful Name of Jesus* (Seattle, WA: Kenyon's Gospel Publishing Society, 1927), 20.

in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you” (John 14:19,20). What a powerful message, Christ is in the believer and the believer is in Christ. While the prosperity preacher may believe Jesus has left him in charge, Scripture will not support this argument. Christ in the believer and the believer in Christ will always translate into true success and prosperity. This true success and prosperity may have little or nothing to do with material, tangible success and prosperity. One cannot put a price tag on spiritual prosperity. In his letter to the Galatians Paul drew a contrast between those who would inherit the Kingdom of God and those who would not. Those who live under the law live to satisfy the desires of the flesh, and the desires of the flesh are contrary to the desires of the spirit (Galatians 5:16). Those who are led by the spirit “will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). True spiritual success and prosperity that money cannot purchase would be the Fruit of the Spirit, which is “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22,23). Having a quality of life that comes through the Fruit of the Spirit is more precious than silver and gold.

Those who promote the prosperity gospel seem to major in the message of their authority. They boast of how they can resist the devil and he will flee from them (James 4:7). However, they often leave off or ignore the first part of that verse which says, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7 KJV). The condition placed upon having the authority to resist the devil is submitting ourselves to God and this requires humility from the believer. When Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, the first of the Beatitudes states, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3 NKJV).



When it comes to the prosperity gospel and the liberties taken when interpreting Scripture, I do not stand alone with my concerns. Dr. Jeffrey Bowens, who has done extensive research on this subject, brings out this important point, “Christian Apologists and others consider the prosperity gospel an aberrant teaching which is a going astray from traditional theology and biblical accuracy.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Sowing and Reaping**

In his book, *The Miracle of Seed-Faith*, Oral Roberts tells the story of how his idea of Seed-Faith was birthed in his heart. He said he saw that everything God does starts with a seed. According to Robert’s, his theology for his Seed-Faith doctrine operates on three principles. In chapter two of his book, he gives the following three principles:

Principle I - God is your source. The key Scripture is Philippians 4:19. “My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Principle II - Give that it may be given to you, the key Scripture is Luke 6:38. “Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”

Principle III - Expect a miracle. The key Scripture is Hebrews 11:1. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

The *Miracle of Seed-Faith* was published in 1970 and has been referenced countless times in fundraising events over the years. In this section, when referring to Scriptures I will be using the King James translation since that is what Oral Roberts used in his book. The key verse for principle two is used often by Roberts and others when it comes to fundraising. A closer look at what Jesus said, “Give, and it shall be given unto

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<sup>21</sup> Bowens, *Prosperity Gospel*, 81.

you: good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38 KJV). The prosperity preachers, Oral Roberts included, isolate this verse from its context in order to use it for selfish gain. When taken in context it is clear that Jesus was not addressing the subject of money. He was teaching on the value of forgiving. Christians are instructed to forgive as found in verse thirty-seven. Jesus is teaching his disciples that they are not to judge but always be ready to forgive. When Oral Roberts published his book, the *Miracle of Seed-Faith*, it wasn’t long until the prosperity preachers were developing their own doctrines on “Sowing and Reaping.” Outrageous promises were made in order to swell the offerings. Instead of giving as a form of worship, people were motivated to give in order to receive ten or one hundred-fold returns. People were giving in order to prosper financially. This was fertile ground for the spirit of greed to grow. Concerning some of the tactics used in fundraising, former daughter-in-law of Oral Roberts, Patti Roberts said she had a “very difficult time distinguishing between the selling of indulgences and the concept of seed faith inflated to the degree to which we had inflated it.”<sup>22</sup>

Another Scripture used to support their money raising schemes is found in Galatians where Paul said, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7 KJV). While this verse deals with sowing and reaping it has nothing to do with money. Paul is dealing with spiritual matters. If the believers at Galatia sow to the flesh they will reap destruction or corruption. If they sow to the spirit, they will reap eternal life. He is addressing the subject of spiritual life or

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22 Patti Roberts and Sherry Andrews, *Ashes to Gold* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 121.

spiritual death. The decision is one that every believer must make. Oral Roberts wrote, “You are a product of seed, so am I. Even Jesus is called the Seed of David. Jesus talked about an eternal law. ‘People reap what they sow’ (Galatians 6:7). You sow a seed, you reap a harvest. You give seed, you receive it back multiplied many times.”<sup>23</sup> What should be troubling to every believer who may be influenced by those who promote the prosperity gospel is how every Scripture they use is always connected to money. Listen to what Trinity Broadcasting Network President Paul Crouch had to say, “If you’re broke, if you’re at your wits end, if you’re out of a job, out of work, let me tell ya. Not only are we going to bless the world and preach Christ to millions and multitudes around the world, but you can be saved yourself by planting seed in this fertile soil called TBN.”<sup>24</sup> Instead of giving as a form of worship, giving becomes a moneymaking machine. The individual is motivated to give because they expect something in return. They are always led to believe that they will have an increase in material wealth.

Giving is a form of worship and every pastor knows what it is like to promote giving in order to meet budgets or raise funds for special projects, but as the old saying goes, the end does not always justify the means. If giving is a form of worship, and I am convinced that it is, we must always be honest and transparent in our fundraising events. Paul gives us instructions on giving that will be helpful for all who are involved in money matters in this modern-day church. Paul said,

Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously we also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is

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23 Oral Roberts, *Miracle of Seed-Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, 1970 ), 66.

24 Paul Crouch, *Praise the Lord*, Trinity Broadcasting Network, July 21, 1992.

written: They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever (2 Corinthians. 9:6-9).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PROJECT DESIGN

#### **Facing the Challenge**

The subject chosen for this thesis-project, *The Impact the Prosperity Gospel Is Having on the Pentecostal Church in the Greater San Antonio, Texas, Area*, was selected after much prayer and consideration. I began the project by gathering all the material I could find concerning the prosperity gospel. My own library produced books by E.W. Kenyon, Paul Billheimer, and John Hagee as well as others who promoted the prosperity gospel. There were also books by John MacArthur, Hank Hannegraaff, Gordon D. Fee as well as others who were critics of this strange gospel. The project began with the ultimate goal of carefully studying the impact the prosperity gospel is having on the Pentecostal church in the greater San Antonio, Texas area.

This is an important subject because this counterfeit gospel referred to as the prosperity gospel, is having a profound impact on the Pentecostal church. Dr. Jeffery B. Bowens, who has written extensively on the subject, makes this profound statement, “The prosperity doctrine perhaps is the single most challenging discussion in Christianity today and of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”<sup>1</sup> The Pentecostal church in the San Antonio, Texas area where I live and pastor is facing a real challenge when it comes to addressing this subject. Pentecostal leadership cannot afford to sit on the sidelines while this movement continues to make inroads into the Pentecostal church.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffery B. Bowens, *Prosperity Gospel* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2012), 54.

Recently, I asked my congregation to raise their hand if they had watched Christian television. Out of the one hundred present, one third responded by saying they had watched televangelists. In a follow-up question I asked them to respond with names. I was encouraged by the response since most of the names mentioned were not the “hard-core” prosperity preachers. I’m sure there were some who listen to these TV preachers who did not respond to my questions. While most of the names given were not the primetime prosperity promoters, there were enough that I realize they are having an impact on the local church.

It has never been my desire to lump all televangelists together as if they are all the same. I am convinced there are those who do good work and their desire is to preach the Word of God to a lost and dying world. I believe these are few in number and they don’t seem to attract the “mass following” of the primetime prosperity preachers.

### **House of Prayer or House of Merchandise**

One of my major concerns throughout this project has been the false doctrine that God has promised material wealth to every believer. I do not understand how these preachers can boast of their gold and silver when they live in a world where children die every day from malnutrition. Ronald Sider had this to say on the subject, “In an age of affluence and poverty most Christians, regardless of theological labels, are tempted to succumb to the heresy of following societies materialistic values rather than biblical truth.”<sup>2</sup> As I continued my research, my thoughts went to the warning Paul had given Timothy concerning greed and love for money and wealth. Paul reminded Timothy that these material things are temporal, and the real value should be placed on godliness and

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2 Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians In an Age of Hunger* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 19.

contentment (1 Timothy 6:6,7). Then Paul drew a contrast between those who live godly lives and are content with those who lust after material things, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:9-10 NKJV). It seems these preachers of prosperity are blinded to what the Bible really teaches when it comes to prosperity. In their blindness they seem to believe that all those who are living in poverty have brought this awful condition upon themselves. Kenneth Copeland even goes far enough to say, “You can have what you say! In fact, what you are saying is exactly what you are getting now. If you are living in poverty and lack and want, change what you are saying, it will change what you have.”<sup>3</sup> My wife and I were having lunch at a restaurant in Jacksonville, Texas, when an elderly couple came in and sat down at a table close by. We exchanged greetings and then the lady began to tell her story of how she and her husband had lost everything they had as Hurricane Harvey destroyed their community. Their flood insurance did not pay off and they did not know what they were going to do. As she told her story, I thought of the words of Kenneth Copeland and how devastating this message of prosperity can be to those who are really hurting. No matter what this couple confesses, they have still lost everything. This positive confession they speak of and the power in what you say to create wealth and prosperity doesn’t work in the real world. With tears in her eyes the lady continued her story of how she and her husband had served God for over fifty years. How could anyone condemn this Christian lady for a

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3 Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974), 98.

lack of faith. Neither should she be accused of having sin in her life. The words of the Apostle Peter came to mind as this precious lady told her story, “These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:7).

As I continued my research, I began to realize the focus of these prosperity preachers never changes. In his book, *Christianity in Crisis*, Hank Hanegraaff gives the account of televangelist, John Avanzini complaining because some church members would not allow their man of God “to have a copy of their complete financial statement.”<sup>4</sup> In order to enforce his request he refers to 2 Kings 4:1-7, “When the widow went to Elisha for help with her back-breaking debt, the first thing the prophet asked for was a financial statement. He asked, ‘what do you have in your house?’ Thank God this widow was able to trust her man of God... Her relationship of trust with him set her free from debt as well as funded her retirement.”<sup>5</sup> Avanzini fails miserably at making his point. He certainly doesn’t qualify to substitute himself for the man of God, Elisha. The true biblical account concerns obedience of the poor widow who needed divine intervention. Nowhere is there any mention of Elisha requiring the widow to produce a financial statement, nor was there any mention in Scripture of the widow receiving a retirement. It is amazing how these preachers can twist and interpret every Scripture they use for their own benefit.

Recently while sitting in my office, I received a call from a lady asking if she could meet with me for a few minutes. She did not disclose the nature of the meeting. I

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4 Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity In Crisis* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 122.

5 John Avanzini, *It’s Not Working, Brother John* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1992), 123.



informed her that I would be at the church the next day and we agreed upon a time. Sure, enough at the appointed time she pulled into the parking lot of the church, accompanied by two elderly women. The conversation began as the lady I'd spoken to on the phone informed me that she had a word from the Lord that concerned me as pastor and my congregation. She then informed me that she was a deaconess in a word of faith church in our area. On the previous Sunday morning she had received a word from the Lord. The Lord had spoken 6139 into her spirit. She immediately told the Lord to explain, and he informed her that the full message would be revealed to her on Monday. Monday while on her way to the supermarket she passed our church on Ingram Road and the digital sign flashed the number 6139 as it identified our location. Then she said the full revelation was given, 6139 Ingram Road, Family Worship Center. She proceeded with the word she had been given for me and my congregation. She informed me that my congregation was one of ten congregations in the city that was selected to sow \$10,000 into her ministry in order to develop a production studio. Politely I told her I did not have the authority to make that decision, but I would pray about it. She was very persistent and boldly informed me that she had been given a word from the Lord that if I gave the \$10,000, our church would receive \$100,000 in return. Before I declined her request, I inquired as to where the \$100,000 would come from. Her reply was the Lord's storehouse. As the three women left, without the \$10,000, I realized the entire conversation was about money. I could not help but wonder what took place in their Sunday morning service. As they pulled out of the church parking lot, I could not help but wonder how many people in San Antonio have been caught up in this deceptive doctrine.

The question must be answered, will the twenty-first Century church be known as the house of prayer or the house of merchandise? Will this modern-day church be known for its love and concern for the poor and underprivileged or will we be known for our crystal cathedrals and bulging bank accounts? In this research project I was reminded of our humble beginnings and how we were always reaching out to the poor and those in need. Of this twenty-first Century church will Jesus be able to say when I was hungry you gave me food and when I needed shelter you took me in? When I was sick you took care of me and when I needed clothes you clothed me (Matthew 25:35,36). That spirit of love and caring for those who can do nothing for one's ministry, seems to be missing altogether in the prosperity movement.

The Apostle James gives a stern warning to those who would oppress the poor and less fortunate. In his closing remarks to the twelve tribes of Israel, James had this to say:

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver have corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the days of slaughter (James 5:1-5).

As I have talked with pastors, laity, friends and strangers I am made to realize the challenge that is before the Pentecostal church in confronting this false gospel. I recently visited a Christian bookstore and the majority of the books on display were written by these televangelists who promote the prosperity gospel. I asked one of the sales clerks why they always had these particular books on display. The answer I received was "they sell; this is what the customers come in looking for." So, again it was about the money.

## **Divine Health or Divine Healing**

Even though the subject of divine health has been covered in a previous chapter, as I continued my research, I have discovered that the prosperity preachers lump divine health and divine healing together. They are not the same nor do they serve the same purpose. Traditional Pentecostalism rejects the doctrine of divine health while embracing divine healing. There is a vast difference between the two doctrines.

The divine health doctrine that is promoted by the prosperity preachers, who are often referred to as “Faith Healers” teaches that a believer is to live above sickness and disease. E. W. Kenyon says, “It is wrong for us to have sickness and disease in our bodies when God laid diseases on Jesus.”<sup>6</sup> But D.R. McConnell, who did graduate work at Oral Roberts University in Theological and Historical studies, had this to say about their teaching, “The admission of disease in public is simply not tolerated in these cults, for reasons that should be obvious. Among those who believe that negative attitudes and confessions have the power to inflict disease, conversation about one’s illness must be severely restricted.”<sup>7</sup>

I discovered that according to the prosperity theology, the fall that took place when Adam and Eve sinned and were cast out of the Garden of Eden is ignored. They believe only those who are living in sin and in rebellion to God are to be affected by the fall. The believer lives in one world and the person living in sin lives in another. But the truth is, we all share the same world, saint and sinner. No matter how spiritual one becomes, he or she must function in a world with fallen systems and structures. The same fallenness applies to our bodies, as we get older age takes a toll on each one of us. When

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6 Essek William Kenyon, *Jesus the Healer* (Seattle, WA: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, 1943), 149.

7 Dan R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 1995), 150.

this happens the divine health theory unravels. There is no such thing as divine health in this life. The Bible teaches us that people live and are destined to die (Hebrews 9:27). Every person that has ever lived on this planet, with the exception of Enoch and Elijah, who God had other plans for, has died and the process continues. While writing this paper I have been called upon several times to travel across the state to attend funerals of men and women of faith.

As a Pentecostal, I reject the doctrine of divine health, but embrace the doctrine of divine healing. Divine healing is under the authority of a sovereign God. Thy will be done is always involved in divine healing. God has healed me many times and when I am sick or suffering I cherish the prayers of my brothers and sisters in Christ. But there are also times when God has brought me through sickness and I was not healed. I have pastored men and women who had glorious testimonies of healing and answered prayers that spanned over half a century, then died of cancer or some other dreaded disease. This relates to the fallenness. This also relates to the “here and now.” Often, we have to be reminded that we are not living in the “Millennial Kingdom.”

With all its phenomenal growth, the world is looking at the Pentecostal church. We need to take a step back and see the church as the world sees the church if our testimony is to be relevant in this twenty-first Century, then we must examine ourselves in light of Scripture. Dr. Eldin Villafañe had this to say, “In the postmodern epoch that we must live in, the gospel needs to be incarnated in costly discipleship. The world looks at the church and wants to see in our lives the marks of the cross—not the search for comfort, prestige, power, and fame.”<sup>8</sup> At this late hour, as Pentecostals I believe we are at

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8 Eldin Villafañe, *Beyond Cheap Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 15.

a crossroads and must choose which gospel we are going to embrace and obey; the gospel the prosperity preachers promote, a gospel of indulgence and greed or the true gospel of Jesus Christ... one of self-denial and obedience to the demands of the cross (Matthew 16:24).

My research has revealed just how deep the prosperity gospel has embedded itself into the Pentecostal church. While visiting a local pastor, the subject of the prosperity gospel came up and as he addressed his concerns he said that he felt as if he was on a “roller coaster ride” and he could try to get off or just stay on the ride and see where it took him. I inquired as to why he felt this way, then he shared with me that his lead Deacon had informed him that he would vote to embrace the prosperity message and include this in their mission statement. Before I left, I prayed with this man of God and wondered how many of our Pentecostal pastors and church leaders in our city are facing the same challenge. But for me I cannot see how the phony message of the prosperity gospel can mix with the message that we are mandated to share with the world. This would be a tragic mixture that would compromise the very message we are to share with a lost and dying world.

### **Job’s Faith and the Sovereignty of God**

There is no doubt that the criticism of Job by those who promote the prosperity gospel is unfair and does not line up with Scripture. I was shocked that so many of the primetime televangelists felt the need to attack Job because of his troubles. To the prosperity crowd, Job’s negative confession showed a lack of faith and this lack of faith mixed with fear was Job’s downfall. Job is attacked for his comments in chapter one

when he said, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away” (Job 1:21b). Superstar televangelist Benny Hinn said,

You know what? We’ve said this a million times, and it’s not even scriptural - all because of Job: The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1:21). I have news for you: that is not Bible; that’s not Bible. The Lord giveth and never taketh away. And just because he said, ‘Blessed be the name of the Lord,’ don’t mean that he’s right. When he said, ‘Blessed be the name,’ he was just being religious. And being religious doesn’t mean you’re right.<sup>9</sup>

Then in her book, *Approval Addiction: Overcoming Your Need to Please Everyone*, Joyce Meyer blames Job’s troubles on his fear.<sup>10</sup> She bases her diagnosis upon Job’s words, “What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me” (Job 3:25).

Benny Hinn and Joyce Meyer were not alone in their criticism, Kenneth Copeland blasts Job for his lack of faith and not having a positive confession.<sup>11</sup>

During my research I was encouraged to find that there were others who did not agree with these critics of Job. Bestselling author Philip Yancey, sheds light on the subject when he wrote,

The book of Job should nail a coffin lid over the idea that every time we suffer it’s because God is punishing us or trying to tell us something. Although the Bible supports the general principle that ‘a man reaps what he sows’ even in this life (see Psalms 1:3; 37:25), the Book of Job proves that other people have no right to apply that general principle to a particular person. Nobody deserved suffering less than Job, and yet few have suffered more.<sup>12</sup>

In my research I discovered that the prosperity preachers aggressively go after those who disagree with their theology. It doesn’t matter if they are people of the Bible such as Job, or the Christian leadership of today. They seem eager to join the ranks of

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9 “The Truth Shall Set You Free,” The Bible Page, accessed July 20, 2018, <http://www.thebiblepage.org/avoid/hinn.shtml>.

10 Joyce Meyer, *Approval Addiction: Overcoming Your Need to Please Everyone* (New York, NY: Faith Words, 2005), 9, 10.

11 Kenneth Copeland, Sermon recorded at Melodyland Christian Center (Anaheim, CA), March 30, 1983.

12 Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 89.

Job's so-called friends. Yet, their testimonies seem to leave them unqualified to criticize Job. Gordon Fee addresses their greed and appetite for material possessions. Fee states, "The best antidote to this disease, therefore, is a good healthy dose of biblical theology."<sup>13</sup>

### **Sound Doctrine**

With all the doctrinal issues I found with prosperity gospel, there was a quote from Kenneth Hagin that surfaced and sheds light on the mindset of the leadership of this movement. Kenneth Hagin, the man who brought the prosperity gospel center stage, the man who opened a Bible College and a publishing house in order to promote this strange doctrine, had this to say, "The church seems to have a hard time staying in the middle of the road on just about any Bible subject."<sup>14</sup> According to Hagin it is the traditional church that must be corrected when it comes to biblical interpretation. And yet with all my research I have not found one serious theologian who agrees with Hagin's interpretation concerning the wealth and health gospel. Theologians such as Gordon Fee and Steven Jack Land condemn Hagin for the liberty he takes with scriptural interpretation. The research uncovered the fact that the prosperity gospel is supported by a few favorite Scriptures, often taken out of context. And I use the term "few favorite Scriptures" because the rest of the Bible is undisturbed.

Theologian Gordon Fee, in his book *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*, has taken their foundational Scriptures on wealth and health, and can show any serious Bible student the fallacy of their teaching. Gordon Fee had this to say in his

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13 Gordon Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2006), 17.

14 Hagin, Kenneth. *The Midas Touch* (Tulsa, OK: Faith Library Publications, 2002), 3.

response to this strange gospel, “American Christianity is rapidly being infected by an insidious disease, the so-called wealth and health gospel—although it has very little of the character of the Gospel in it.”<sup>15</sup>

From the very beginning of this research I discovered that the prosperity preachers were more concerned with material prosperity than soul prosperity. All during the process of gathering material I would stop and ask myself... where is the gospel message, where is the message of salvation? I asked a friend who has bought into this strange gospel, where is the message of the cross and the shed blood of Jesus? His response to me was, “There are more important issues of the here and now.” He went on to explain, “You know that’s old news.” He then informed me that people are looking for something they can take hold of and hold onto. To my friend the gospel message is about the here and now.

As I continued to read books, magazines and listen to sermon after sermon, I continued with my original question, “Where is the sermon where the main theme or emphasis is on true salvation?” My mind went back many times during this process to the words of Jesus when he spoke to his disciples, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Matthew 16:26). One brother told me that their message of health and wealth was about enjoying life to its fullest, today. Then he quoted a favorite Psalm, “Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits” (Psalms 6:19a NKJV). The NIV translation of the same Scripture says, “Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens” (Psalms 68:19).

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<sup>15</sup> Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*, 7.



I discovered that the prosperity crowd is convinced that all the promises God has made are for the here and now. They believe they are made available to the believer today. In his book, *Fulfill Your Destiny*, Kenneth Hagin Jr. reinforces this teaching of the here and now when he said, “You see, you don’t have to wait for someone to lay hands on you be healed. You don’t have to wait for someone to pray for you. When you find out that God’s Word has already made healing your divine destiny, then you can jump out of bed! You can shout and rejoice—because you were and are healed.”<sup>16</sup> As I read these words from Kenneth Hagin Jr., I thought of Beulah Bohannon, one of our pastor’s wives who is in the hospital in Austin, Texas, and unconscious with cancer in the brain. Her family has been called in because she is not expected to live. It would be foolish and unethical to tell her to jump out of bed because she is healed. I believe in divine healing, but God is sovereign, and he is the healer, not our faith. I asked one of the supporters of the prosperity gospel to explain the Scripture in Revelation where it says, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4). I was informed that this Scripture was for all of us believers who did not have the faith to receive all the benefits God made available here and now.

### **The World at Our Doorsteps**

In my research I found that San Antonio, Texas, the city where I have lived and pastored since 1985, is considered a very religious city. With the tremendous growth in the last two decades, it has become the seventh largest city in the United States and the second-largest city in Texas, as well as the second most populous city in the southern

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<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Hagin Jr., *Fulfill Your Destiny* (Tulsa, OK: Faith Library Publications, 1998), 28.

United States. In 1718, Spanish settlers built the mission, Mission San Antonio de Valero, and as more settlers came to the new frontier a small city began to grow around the mission. In 1720, a second mission, San Jose y San Miguel de Aguayo, was established and ten years later three other missions were established.

This history is important because it shows the deep religious roots of the city. Today the city has a population of approximately 1.5 million residents. Much of this growth is from immigrants from other countries, especially Mexico, Central and South America. But others have migrated to San Antonio from many other countries bringing their religions and religious cultures with them.

These immigrants came with the spiritual hunger to find love, fellowship and acceptance. They were searching for a church that was able to respond to their spiritual needs. Some of those found their way to the Pentecostal churches where they found a fellowship and a freedom to express themselves in worship. These immigrants are having a real impact on our churches even today. As a rule, they are sincere and deeply spiritual. They have a hunger to know and understand the Bible. This places a great responsibility upon us to preach and teach the truth. We have been given an opportunity to share God's precious word in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Many of these immigrants have taken advantage of educational opportunities. These young men and women who have been called into ministry are entering Bible schools and seminaries. One of my members, Ricardo Romano, is from Mexico. He is working on his master's degree from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. I have just turned in a recommendation for Brother Ricardo to become a full-time student at Gordon

Conwell. I share this because there are those who have looked down on many immigrants as lazy and undisciplined losers.

I also found that the prosperity preachers are quick to take advantage of these immigrants who are trying to adjust to their new way of life. I heard of a service that took place recently on the south side of the city when the preacher was promising a trouble-free walk to citizenship to those who would raise a certain amount of money for his ministry. Because many of these immigrants have come from countries where the prosperity gospel is very popular, some live with guilt because they are not prospering financially. This is one more reason we as Pentecostals must confront this strange gospel of prosperity.

### **Revelation Knowledge vs. Book Knowledge**

My research has unveiled the fact that those who believe and promote the prosperity gospel depend on revelation knowledge at the expense of book knowledge. They put revelation knowledge on the same level as what the Scripture teaches. Revelation knowledge is what they believe God is personally revealing to them. God speaks directly through them. The Pentecostal church has always embraced the Doctrine of Divine Revelation. Where we part ways with the prosperity doctrine of revelation knowledge is that we believe true Revelation Knowledge, or Divine Knowledge is always subject to Scripture. We believe that it is possible for man to misread what God is saying, so all Divine Revelation must line up with what God has said in the Word of God.

While preparing this chapter for this project, a dear Christian sister shared this story. On the east side of San Antonio there is a Pentecostal church where in the last year the pastor has become an apostle. The church sign had to be repainted with the word

‘Pastor’ removed and replaced with ‘Apostle.’ This all happened after the pastor had attended a Word of Faith conference where he was anointed as an apostle. His whole ministry changed. Up to this point he had preached a traditional sermon on Sunday with the service closing with a time of prayer. Now he is introduced as an apostle and his sermon is always dealing with what God is revealing to him. He calls people out of the pews to come forward as he gives a word of knowledge to them.

A few weeks ago, this Christian sister told me she had been invited by a relative who is a member of that church and the van was loaded with family members as they drove across town for the service. They took an elderly uncle who had recently lost his wife to cancer. That morning the pastor called the uncle out of the congregation. As the uncle came forward, the apostle informed him that God had revealed to him that this gentleman was to go home and lay his hands on his wife. He was to rebuke the demon of sickness and she would be healed. The elderly man tried to explain to the so-called apostle that his wife had recently passed away. Instead of listening, the ‘apostle’ rebuked the old gentleman for a lack of faith. This nonsense is too often repeated by those who have bought into this strange gospel. They seem to believe that they are infallible in their understanding. People like the elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife to cancer are hurt and disillusioned. This is certainly having a direct impact on our churches.

There is another problem concerning this doctrine of revelation knowledge. I have discovered that there can be a real resentment toward those who have pursued higher education. Author Michael Klassen who was once a proponent of the prosperity gospel had his eyes opened as he advanced academically. In his book, *Strange Fire, Holy Fire* he speaks of how he had to “live down” his education. Of course, over the years this has

been a problem in Pentecostalism as a whole. But in the prosperity movement, my research has shown that many of the primetime televangelists seem to resent “book learning” because it seems to create questions for their revelation knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

For this project, I set out to gather as much information as I could from as many different sources as possible. I was soon to find out that there was no shortage of data on the subject I had chosen. Christian television was a prime source and therefore I disciplined myself to listen to at least six prime time Televangelists weekly. Several networks such as Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) were my main sources. TBN was founded by Paul and Jan Crouch, who were promoters of the prosperity gospel.

I had determined to listen with an open mind to those televangelists who were the most influential preachers and teachers on Christian television. I sat for hours taking notes as televangelists such as Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, Joel Osteen, Marilyn Hickey, Mike Murdock, Joseph Prince, Jesse Duplantis, Paula White, John Avanzini, Joyce Meyer, John Hagee, Juanita Bynum, and Kenneth and Gloria Copeland taught this doctrine of health and wealth. I listened to recordings by Kenneth Hagin and Oral Roberts. The major emphasis of their sermons was always on material wealth and success. As I listened the words of the Apostle James came to mind when he said, “Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days” (James 5:2,3).

My research for this project included sitting down with pastors and other church leaders from the greater San Antonio area and sharing my concerns. At least three of

these pastors realize the negative impact the prosperity gospel was having on their congregations. One pastor informed me that he was near retirement and would pass the problem on to the next pastor. After talking to eight pastors, only one informed me that he saw nothing wrong with the doctrine of health and wealth. There is one Pentecostal church in our area that recently split over this doctrine when the pastor announced he was ready to embrace the message of prosperity.

After a third of my own congregation informed me that they had listened to Christian television, it was clear that the prosperity gospel is having an impact on my own congregation, since most of the primetime televangelists promote the prosperity gospel.

This project required that I read books and magazine articles written by these teachers. Some of these authors have had bestselling books and continue to write them. As I talked with each pastor I inquired if they were familiar with the books these authors had written. All were familiar with some of the books and most said they had books in their library by some of these authors. I asked each one if they had read the classic by televangelist Oral Roberts, *Miracle of Seed-Faith*. All had read this book.

While visiting an elderly Christian who had served God for many years, she informed me that her husband who had died several years ago, was a follower of Kenneth Hagin and he had boxes and Hagin's monthly magazine, *The Word of Faith*. So I left with an armload of magazines that were very helpful for my research. These magazines spanned a decade and yet his message of health and wealth never changed.

Finally, I met with deacons, elders and other church leaders, as well as faithful church members. The storyline was the same. They all seem to realize the challenge that

we face in the Pentecostal church when it comes to confronting those who promote this false gospel within our congregations. We all agreed that it is imperative for the leadership of the Pentecostal church to come together and speak with one voice in dealing with this problem we all face.

The preachers of the prosperity gospel seem to have little regard or else they have been deceived when it comes to understanding the sovereignty of God. No doubt this is one reason they take such liberty in twisting the Scriptures to support their non-biblical views and doctrines. As brought out in this thesis, they believe Jesus went away and left them in charge. This is how the little god doctrine began. It is disturbing that the prosperity gospel has made such inroads into our Pentecostal churches and it seems their influence increases with time.

It is time we wake up and take a stand before more of our people are drawn away by these false prophets. Jesus said, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves” (Matthew 7:15).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### OUTCOMES

#### **Summary of Findings**

In this project I have endeavored to examine and answer the question as to why the prosperity gospel has experienced such wide acceptance in the Pentecostal church in the greater San Antonio, Texas area. In this materialistic age the name alone, “Prosperity Gospel” tells the story. The name itself sets it apart from any other serious denominational movement. This so-called gospel gives more attention to satisfying the desires of the flesh than it does to salvation. This is one reason there has been so much sexual immorality among the high-profile, prime time televangelists who promote this gospel. As I researched this question, I was reminded of Paul’s words of warning and instruction to the believers at Colossae when he said, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, lusts, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). We are living in a materialistic age which is embedded in our American culture. As Christians we are not exempt from desiring to live the American dream. Immigrants are entering our country every day searching for a better way of life. There are people in the congregation I pastor from the Philippines, India, Mexico, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico as well as other parts of the world. They all have one thing in common, they came to this country searching for a better standard of living. While in a conversation with one of these couples recently, the wife smiled and said, “We are living the American dream.”



So, within itself, prosperity is a positive thing. I pray for God to prosper our people. It is encouraging to see people have a degree of ambition to be successful. Being the opposite, lazy and undisciplined is certainly nothing to be admired. For those who have prospered and are successful the question must be asked, why has God blessed me in this manner? Has God blessed me so I can hoard wealth, while taking advantage of the less fortunate (James 5:3), or has God blessed me so I can bless others (Genesis 12:2)?

My research revealed one reason the prosperity gospel has experienced such wide acceptance in the Pentecostal church in San Antonio is that the promoters of this gospel seem to breathe life into the Pentecostal churches that were dead or dying. The preachers who come are very charismatic. They know how to stir a congregation. A local Assembly of God pastor who now embraces the prosperity message, told me before he made that decision his congregation was so spiritually dead he couldn't even get an amen from his people. And he went on to say that he had never been able to draw the crowd he has today. Then his question was, what would you do? I told him that I believe the Apostle Paul had given the answer to his question in his second letter to Timothy when he said,

Preach the word: be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:2-5)

### **The Gospel of Enticement**

This gospel of perfect health and wealth is very enticing. Everyone I know would desire to have perfect health and to the younger crowd the enticement of having wealth is even more appealing. To always preach and teach what the crowd wants to hear will

guarantee an audience but we Pentecostals must hear what Jesus said, “If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit” (Matthew 15:14b). Pentecostals are prime targets to those who preach this false gospel.

The word entice is embedded into the message of these charlatans who show little or no concern for the shattered lives they leave behind who have been disillusioned and deceived by their false hopes and promises. While attending a funeral recently, I noticed a gentleman who must have been in his sixties. After the service he came to me and asked if I knew who he was, but before I could answer he gave his name. It had been over forty years since I had seen or heard from him. The last time I saw him we were in the ministry together. I was pastoring my first church and he was a young evangelist. He had a fruitful ministry, then he was lured into the prosperity movement and by the time he came to his senses he had lost his ministry and today he doesn’t even profess Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Recently I was invited to a revival service where the evangelist, a Kenneth Copeland disciple announced the title for his sermon, “Why God wants you to prosper.” At the close of his sermon he gave his altar call, but instead of asking people to come forward and surrender their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ, the evangelist asked everyone who wanted to be successful to come forward and he would anoint them for success. As the people came forward my thoughts went to the words of Job when he said, “Be careful that no one entices you by riches, do not let a large bribe turn you aside” (Job 36:18). Webster gives the meaning to the word entice as “to set afire or attract by offering hope of reward or pleasure.”<sup>1</sup> The Apostle Peter gives a scolding rebuke to false teachers when

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1 *Webster's New World Dictionary*, Second College Edition, s.v. “entice.”

he states, “With eyes full of adultery they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed – an accursed brood” (2 Peter 2:14)! The definition for the word seduce given by the NIV Exhaustive Concordance, is seduce or lure.<sup>2</sup>

Believers who were once active members in the traditional Pentecostal churches are now active in the churches that promote the prosperity gospel. With all the promises of health and wealth they have been lured away. Concerning the impact the prosperity gospel has had on Christendom in America, author and professor Kate Bowler said, “Millions of American Christians came to see money, health, and good fortune as divine.”<sup>3</sup> This has become a real problem in the Pentecostal church. Some who have been lured away by these prosperity promoters seem to believe that having wealth will give them a spiritual advantage.

Those who believe and preach this prosperity gospel are convinced that they have access to all the covenant blessings God promised Abraham in Genesis chapter twelve. God told Abraham he would make his name great and he would be a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3). Special emphasis is placed upon the physical material blessings.

My research shows that there is a dangerous spirit of pride and boasting involved in these ministries. The wise man Solomon said, “In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride” (Proverbs 14:3a NKJV). Instead of humility these ministers boast of their successes and what they have accomplished. This is so different from the traditional Pentecostal heritage. The Pentecostal church has humble beginnings and it is too late to let pride run rampant in the church.

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<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Goodrick and John R. Kohlberger III, *The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), s.v. “seduce.”

<sup>3</sup> Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7

## **Out with the Poor, In with the Rich**

As Pentecostals we have a rich heritage of reaching out to the poor and underprivileged. With so many of our people embracing this new doctrine of prosperity, this is beginning to change. Many are influenced by prosperity preachers such as Kenneth Hagin, who had this to say about Jesus and the poor,

During a visit to the Bethany home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, Jesus said to the guests of the supper, ' You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me' (John12:8). Notice that Jesus didn't call Himself poor. He made a definite distinction between the poor and Himself.<sup>4</sup>

It is teaching such as this that is eroding our identity as Pentecostals with the poor. If we cannot identify with the poor and those in need, how can we identify with Jesus. Jesus was not drawing a line of separation between himself and the poor. He was simply reminding his disciples that his time of departure was at hand. Jesus never distanced himself from those who were considered poor and destitute. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians he states, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). The incarnation gives insight to what Paul is saying, Jesus gave up the wealth and comfort of heaven, so he could enter this world of pain, suffering, and poverty in order to identify with fallen humanity. He was born into a poor family and his ministry would be spent ministering to those of lower social standing. Paul spoke of how we could become rich through the poverty of Christ. Paul was evidently speaking of the glorious riches, spiritual wealth.

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4 Kenneth Hagin, *The Midas Touch* (Tulsa, OK: Faith Library Publications, 2002), 55.

When Jesus walked this earth, he sought the sick and the poor in order to minister to them. They were not required to support his ministry financially in order to receive his blessings. My research shows that the prosperity promoters expect the poor to invest financially into the kingdom they are building. They say God honors what one gives. If you do not sow seeds of faith (money) then there is no return.

It is a deceptive practice to tell people that all they have to do is sow a seed in faith and prosperity and success will follow. In my research I found that they always connect faith with money.

### **Identifying with the New Cross**

As I shared earlier in this thesis when I moved to San Antonio thirty-two years ago the prosperity gospel was not embraced by the Pentecostal churches as it is today. Many, if not most of our leaders believed this was a passing fad. I went to my file and pulled out an old sermon outline where I had preached a message entitled, “Just a Passing Fad.” Here we are thirty-two years later, and this so-called passing fad is stronger than ever. It continues to experience explosive growth and influence throughout the city. One Assembly of God pastor told me that as he embraced the prosperity message it revived his congregation. He shared with me as to how his church was dying until he began to preach this prosperity message.

I am convinced this thesis has exposed the real problem for our leadership as well as our congregations. It is a problem when these so-called preachers are given the freedom to stand in our pulpits and preach this false doctrine. Paul’s warning to the Saints at Ephesus of savage wolves who would come into the church to destroy the sheep (Acts 20:29) seems so appropriate in this twenty-first Century church. Paul was very specific

when he said, “Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). The research has shown that the problem we have is an inside problem. These preachers have risen up from our own ranks in order to draw away their own disciples. Recently while warning a teenager about the danger of being deceived by these smooth-talking prosperity promoters, the teenager’s response was yes, but it sounds so good. There are many innocent, naïve people in our congregations who are depending on their pastors and church leaders to stand up and guard them against these false teachers.

It wasn’t long into my research that I discovered the prosperity message completely redefines the purpose of the cross. I have never seen the cross so misrepresented by any other group of people. The blood, pain and suffering seem to have disappeared in their teaching. I have been informed by several proponents of the prosperity gospel that the preaching of the cross is for bygone days and doesn’t speak to the modern-day church. Jesus taught those who came to hear him that no one can be his disciple unless they are willing to say no to the flesh and take up their cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24). It has always intrigued me that these prosperity preachers are so adamantly opposed to the preaching of the biblical message of the cross which requires sacrifice and even suffering for the cause of Christ (Ephesians 3:1), yet they expect people who have very little of this world’s goods to sacrifice in order to support their ministry.

After searching through book after book I began to realize the cross the prosperity crowd has embraced is a different cross than I find in Scripture. They have redefined the cross as an instrument of privilege rather than an instrument of suffering and death. Their

cross and the cross of Jesus Christ are in direct conflict. Those who are preaching the prosperity message have perverted the message of the cross and this is a problem for the Pentecostal church. They have found a religion without the demands of the cross. As our people hear this perverted gospel, they are being deceived.

### **Our Leadership Must Be Rooted and Grounded in the Faith**

I see that our pastors must be rooted and grounded in the faith. According to Paul's letter to the brethren at Colossae they must continue in the faith if they are to overcome. He admonishes them to be grounded and steadfast so they will not be moved away from the gospel (Colossians 1:23). One reason the prosperity gospel has made such inroads into the Pentecostal church is a lack of preparation of our leadership. In order to challenge those who preach this gospel, our ministers must know the Word of God and be prepared to take a stand and defend the gospel (Phillipians 1:7). Many times, those who promote the prosperity gospel find little, if any resistance from our leadership. This has given them an open door to preach and teach this false doctrine.

Our leadership must be prepared to discern what is truth and what is error. In his book, *A Call to Discernment*, author Jay Adams tells the story of a letter he received from a friend who said, "A bank teller is not trained to catch counterfeit money. But handling the 'real' and becoming acquainted with the 'real,' the moment a bad one comes across his hand he recognizes it."<sup>5</sup> This speaks to a real need in our churches today. If the church is going to confront these evil forces and false doctrines from penetrating our congregations, the leadership must be prepared. Yes, there is a need for our church leadership to continue growing in the Word. On this subject Paul had this to say, "As you

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<sup>5</sup> Jay E. Adams, *A Call to Discernment* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1987), 55.

therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:6,6 NKJV). The phrase Paul uses, “as you have been taught,” is so important in dealing with the challenge the church is facing in this postmodern age. Teaching ministry in the church is so important. This is especially true in the Pentecostal church where there are so few academic leadership requirements. Someone working in a supermarket gets saved and six months later they are pastoring a church. This is a system that all Pentecostals are familiar with and today we are reaping the consequences. There must be more emphasis placed on academic preparation for church leadership.

It is sad to say but many times ministers in the Pentecostal movement are discouraged from pursuing any type of seminary degree. Leaders are often told you don’t need it, it will just get in your way. This is one of the major reasons the prosperity gospel has thrived in our Pentecostal churches. Many of our leaders do not feel qualified to confront those who are promoting this false doctrine. Then there is a hesitation because none of us want to hinder the moving of the Holy Spirit. Many of those who come in among us as lambs seem to be so anointed.

### **Recommendation**

There must be more emphasis placed on preparing leadership, especially pastoral leadership that would be able to identify and confront the teachers that promote and teach this false gospel in our churches. Young men and women who will be going into the pastoral ministry should be encouraged to pursue seminary degrees. This would help prepare them to protect our people from those who promote these false doctrines. According to Scripture, pastors and teachers are given to equip their congregations for



ministry (Ephesians 4:12). In the words of the apostle Paul, “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14). Again, our pastors, especially young pastors, should be encouraged to pursue higher Christian education through seminary courses.

As leaders we must continue to warn our people concerning the pitfalls of embracing the prosperity gospel. When the promises of wealth and health do not materialize there is a real danger of becoming discouraged and giving up on God. It is not God’s will for every Christian to be wealthy, at least not in this life. Devout Christians are not exempt from financial struggles. This holds true for health issues as well. The study of Job sheds light on these issues.

There must be more teaching on true prosperity. Some of the most prosperous people on planet Earth have little when it comes to material wealth. In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, he warned him of those who believed and taught that serving God was a means to wealth (1 Timothy 6:5). Paul said, “But godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6). Those who remain faithful to the end will inherit all the promises God has given his people, and the greatest of these is the promise of eternal life (1 John 2:25).

The Pentecostal church must proclaim the true message of the cross. The cross is an instrument of suffering and death. Jesus shed his blood upon the cross in order to purchase our salvation. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16 NKJV).

The poor, the outcast and downtrodden must not be neglected. Those who are hurting and are brokenhearted must be healed and those who are held captive by sin must be set free (Luke 4:18). This ministry will require servant leaders who are willing to step out of their comfort zones and serve those who are in need. Humility must reign while pride and boasting are cast out. To God be the glory.

This thesis has shown the challenge the Pentecostal church is facing in confronting and exposing this false gospel known as the prosperity gospel. The promoters of the prosperity gospel seem to have little regard for accurately interpreting Scripture. The perverted gospel they preach has little resemblance to the gospel found in the New Testament. Jesus never promised a life of fortune and fame to those who would follow him. Instead, he warned of the danger of seeking after silver and gold. He told his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:23,24).

The pride and arrogance which God hates (Proverbs 8:13) is evident in these ministries. The Scripture teaches, pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). The true servant of God is called to humble himself and follow Jesus, not as a little god but as a humble servant. We must educate our people through proper teaching and training to know and discern truth from error. There is only room for one “super star” in the church and that is Jesus Christ. Referring to Jesus, Paul said,

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or authorities; all things have been created

through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Colossians 1:15-20).

As Pentecostal leaders we must call our people back to worshiping and exalting Jesus and Him alone.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Informed Consent Document**

Research Subject: The Impact The Prosperity Gospel Is Having On the Pentecostal Church In the Greater San Antonio, Texas area.

Researcher: Jimmy Brooks

The purpose of this questionnaire is to acquire a better understanding of the prosperity gospel and the impact it is having on the Pentecostal Church in the greater San Antonio area. The information you provide will be helpful in understanding how the church leadership should confront this issue. This study is being conducted by Pastor Jimmy Brooks, a minister of the Church of God of Prophecy. You have been invited to participate in this study and by signing this consent form, you voluntarily participated. The information you give, as well as others who participate in this study will be presented only in summary form and will never be linked to your name. There are no foreseeable risks in your participation and there is no monetary compensation associated with this study.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the research study and any questions you may have had, have been answered. You have voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

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Participants Name (Print)

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Signature of Participant

Date

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Researcher's Statement**

I have discussed the above points with the participant. It is my understanding that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved in participating in this research study.

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Researcher's Signature

Date

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